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ABSTRACT

The Mass Communication and Society section of the Proceedings contains the following 17 papers: "Interactivity and the 'Cyber-Fan': Audience Involvement within the Electronic Fan Culture of the Internet" (Vic Costello); "A Reassessment of the Relationship between Public Affairs Media Use and Political Orientations" (Kim A. Smith); "Journalists and Their Computers: An Inseparable Link for the Future?" (Bruce Garrison); "Do You Admit or Deny? An Experiment in Public Perceptions of Politicians Accused of Scandal" (Patrick Meirick and Zixue Tai); "Drudging Up the News: 'The Drudge Report' and Its Use of Sources" (Scott Abel); "New Media, Old Values: What Online Newspaper Journalists Say Is Important to Them" (Ann M. Brill); "Migrant Workers: Myth or Reality? A Case Study of News Narrative in English-Language Thai Newspapers, 'The Nation' and 'Bangkok Post', during Asian Economic Crisis 1997" (Suda Ishida); "Differential Employment Rates in the Journalism and Mass Communication Labor Force Based on Gender, Race and Ethnicity: Exploring the Impact of Affirmative Action" (Lee B. Becker, Edmund Lauf, and Wilson Lowrey); "Is the Web Sexist? A Content Analysis of Children's Web Sites" (Linda Ver Steeg, Robert LaRose, and Lynn Rampoldi-Hnilo); "MPAA Film Ratings: Are They a Disservice to Parents?" (Ron Leone); "Using Is Believing: The Influence of Reliance on the Credibility of Online Political Information" (Thomas J. Johnson, and Barbara K. Kaye); "Autonomy in Journalism: How It Is Related to Attitudes and Behavior of Media Professionals" (Armin Scholl and Siegfried Weischenberg); "Screen Sex, 'Zine Sex, and Teen Sex: Do Television and Magazines Cultivate Adolescent Females' Sexual Attitudes?" (Michael J. Sutton, Jane D. Brown, and Karen M. Wilson); "Changes in Female Roles in Taiwanese Women's Magazines, 1971-1992" (Ping Shaw); "Public Trust or Mistrust?: Perceptions of Media Credibility in the Information Age" (Spiro Kiousis); "The Logic of the Link: The Associative Paradigm in Communication Criticism" (Dennis D. Cali); and "When Bad Things Happen to Bad People: Will Social Comparison Theory Explain Effects of Viewing TV Talk Shows?" (Cynthia M. Frisby). (RS)

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INTERACTIVITY AND THE 'CYBER-FAN': AUDIENCE INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE ELECTRONIC FAN CULTURE OF THE INTERNET

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Growth of the Internet

The Internet has become a popular target medium for a plethora of academic and commercial research activities. Its rapid evolution from a faddish technological oddity to a full fledged global medium of human communication and interaction has created a new frontier of empirical opportunities for social scientists. During a four-year time span from 1994 to 1998, the number of Internet users in the United States grew from 3.5 million to more than 57 million people (Clemente, 1998; Anonymous, 1998, May 9).

Clemente (1998) notes that "since the introduction of the Web in 1992, the Internet has nearly doubled in size every year, far exceeding the growth rates of all previous communications technologies including the cellular telephone, VCR, television, radio, and conventional telephone" (p. 5).

Recent data show a growing dependence on the Internet for a host of informational and communication-related purposes. The 1997 American Internet User's survey found that 75% of adult Internet users now consider themselves dependent on the Internet in their daily lives (FIND/SVP, 1997). Other findings reveal that "web users are relying more and more on the Internet in their everyday lives for commerce, entertainment, and as a vital source of information" (Anonymous, 1998, paragraph 3).

The two components of the Internet that have gained the most popularity with users are electronic mail and the World Wide Web. Recent research found that the majority of Internet users consider electronic mail (84%) and the World Wide Web (82%) indispensable technologies in their everyday lives (Georgia Tech Research Center, 1997). As Clemente (1998) predicts,

> The Internet is destined to become a pervasive yet unobtrusive force in our lives. It will become the medium by which we will keep in constant contact with our families and friends, watch movies, check the weather, read the newspaper, prepare a speech for work, make a phone call, pay monthly bills and buy Christmas gifts. It is destined to become so ubiquitous that the novelty of its usage will simply fade into the background. The Internet is a by-product of this, the information age, and will ultimately become as common as the air we breathe. (p. 4)

Recent studies and findings "document the transition of the Internet from an overly-hyped curiosity to a communications and information utility on which millions of Americans now rely" (FIND/SVP, 1997, paragraph 1).

Cyber-Fans and The Electronic Fan Culture of the Internet

It has been suggested that the real significance of a new communication technology has to do with "how it is used and whether it is used by people to, in some fashion, extend what they already do via other forms of communication" (Ball-Rokeach & Reardon, 1988, p. 135). Such an extension can be observed within the on-line communication channels of the Internet by television fans that routinely utilize the Internet's vast array of dedicated television web sites and discussion groups to supplement the viewing of their favorite TV programs. For lack of a better term, these hybrid netizens are referred to in this paper as cyber-fans. The term is suggested in order to distinguish on-line fans from other television fans that have not yet taken the plunge into the electronic fan culture of the Internet. As more and more users gain access to the Internet, it appears likely that this on-line segment of the fan population will continue to grow as well.

As the population of Internet users continues to grow, traditional media usage is likely to be affected. In fact, the displacement of television, print and radio is beginning to show signs of increasing, as more and more people shift away from conventional media activities to make more time available for Internet-based communication activities (FIND/SVP, 1997). Recent data show that as many as 35% of all Internet users indicate that they watch less television as a result of the Internet (Outing, 1998).

However, few people are suggesting that the Internet will result in the permanent demise of conventional mass media channels. It seems more likely that existing media, like television, will simply evolve and adapt to the presence of the Internet in the everyday lives of people.

> With recent developments in set-top box design and the ability to compress Internet protocols into broadcast formats, those willing to foot the bill soon will have something on their TV that doesn't look anything like broadcasts of old.... consumers with the latest and greatest electronic toys will be watching television while simultaneously pulling related information off the Internet. (Vittore, 1998, paragraph 1)

The Internet is a technological resource that has the potential of radically transforming the television viewing experience. The Internet is being used as a supplemental source of information and for human contact and interaction. This activity appears to be driven by the audiences' existing association and involvement with their favorite television programs. As Newhagen (1996) suggests, there has never

> been much empirical support for displacement theories. Whereas older systems may not go into instant extinction because of the Internet, they will be radically transformed by it. Moments of transition allow students of media the opportunity to reconsider their most basic assumptions, gaining fresh insight into the old technology and setting the stage for understanding the new one. (as quoted in Newhagen & Rafaeli, 1996, p. 13)

Coffey and Stipp (1997) found that "instead of replacement, the data show interactions between the media in which television often impacts PC activity and Internet use" (p. 61). The authors point out that

> predictions of a complete replacement of one medium by another, as made by Gilder (1994), were not supported by past experience: radio did not replace newspapers, TV did not replace the movies or radio, satellites and cable did not replace broadcast TV. In each case, the 'old' medium continued to flourish because of unique attributes and content which serve different audience needs. (p. 61)

This conclusion echoed earlier research by Becker, Dunwoody, and Rafaeli (1983) on the effects of cable television on the uses of other media including traditional television viewing. The authors suggested that future research "keep open the possibility that audience members both replace prior media habits by use of cable services as well as use these new services to supplement existing habits" (p. 139). While it may be true that the Internet competes directly with television for the attention of viewers, the Internet is also being used conjointly with television to meet audience needs that cannot be satisfied by viewing alone. In this context, the Internet serves as a complement to the television-viewing experience and contributes to a greater involvement of cyber-fans with their favorite television programs.

A Uses and Gratifications Approach

The uses and gratifications approach has proven to be an effective empirical tool for understanding why people use media and the benefits derived from such use. The approach is particularly helpful as an exploratory paradigm for the study of new media technology, particularly in situations where empirical data is limited or non-existent. To date, very little is known about how television viewing and Internet use are interrelated within the electronic fan culture of cyberspace. The electronic fan culture of the Internet offers a unique research venue because it allows for opportunities to observe various modes of human communication within virtual communities that exist primarily because of traditional mass media.

A Uses and Dependency Model of Cyber-Fan Activity

Figure 1 presents a model of cyber-fan activity within the integrative environments of mass and computer-mediated communication. This model was adapted from the uses and dependency model created by Rubin and Windahl (1986, p. 188). The authors suggested the model in response to criticisms that the uses and gratifications approach was "too individualistic in conception and method, making it difficult to link personal media use to larger societal structures" (p. 184). This criticism was based in part on the fact that a great deal of uses and gratifications research had basically ignored the social and cultural contexts in which mass communication activity occurs. The uses and dependency model helped to readdress the role of functional alternatives in contributing to the need fulfillment of the television audience (Palmgreen, 1984).

Consistent with the uses and gratifications perspective, the model shows media use as initiating from the social and psychological needs and motives of the audience. The model suggests that the more involved a person is with the viewing of their favorite television program the more likely they will seek out alternative communication channels (like the Internet) for extended need gratification. For the cyber-fan, the model also suggests that one's dependency on a favorite television program is empirically related to one's dependency on supplemental communication activities within the electronic fan culture of the Internet and vice versa.

Rubin and Windahl (1986) suggest that "dependency is really a continuous concept since an individual may become dependent on communication channels or messages to varying degrees" (p. 187). Recent studies continue to support the idea that a dependency relationship with media content can mediate audience behavior and activity within and across various communication channels (Rosenstein & Grant, 1997).

Rubin and Windahl (1986) argue that a uses and dependency model "furnishes fresh ideas about the origin and structure of audience needs and motives, as well as a framework for discussing the role of functional alternatives and the consequences of media use" (p. 186). Such a model seems to fit within the goals of this study, which attempts to explore the cyber-fan's extension of television viewing involvement within the fan culture of cyberspace. As was previously mentioned, the use of the Internet in this case can be viewed as both a functional alternative to mass media use or simply as a supplement to the viewing of one's favorite television program. As Rubin and Rubin (1985) argued,

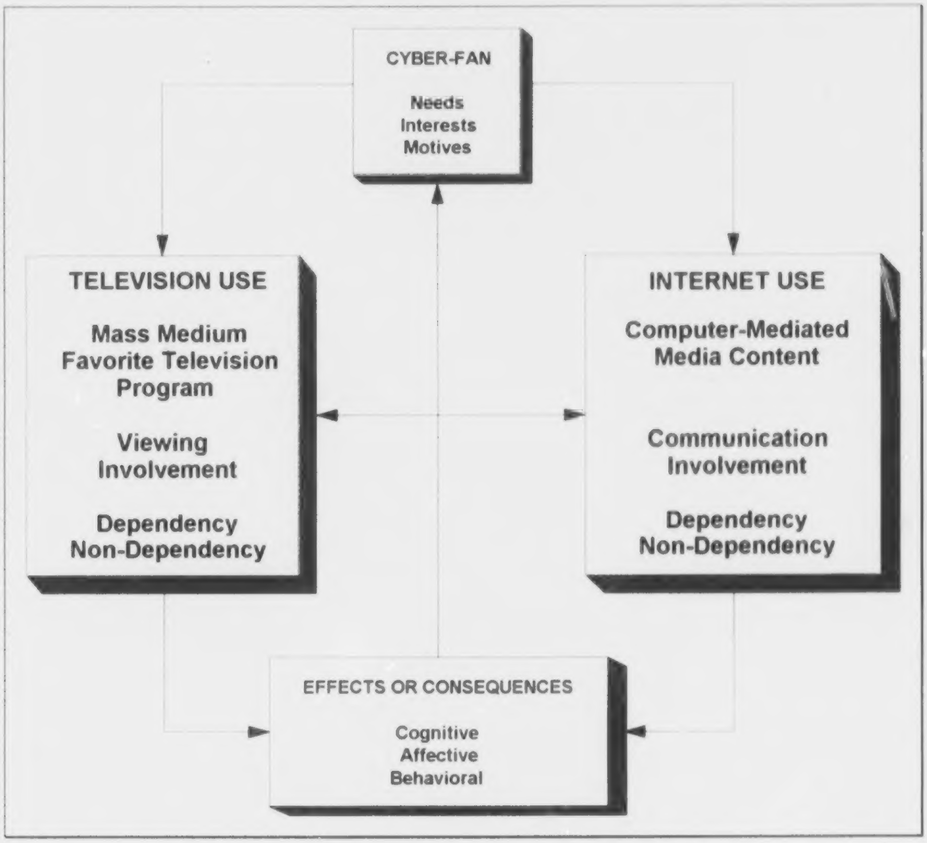
CYBER-FAN
Needs
Interests
Motives
TELEVISION USE
Mass Medium
Favorite Television Program
Viewing Involvement
Dependency
Non-Dependency
INTERNET USE
Computer-Mediated Media Content
Communication Involvement
Dependency
Non-Dependency
EFFECTS OR CONSEQUENCES
Cognitive
Affective
Behavioral

Figure 1: Uses and Dependency Model of Cyber-fan Activity

"it is unproductive to regard either the media or interpersonal channels as always being functional alternatives to the other. They are potentially coequal alternatives that vary in terms of their primary or alternative nature depending on individual and environmental conditions" (p. 39).

The uses and dependency model is suggested for its heuristic value in an attempt to better understand the communication activity of the cyber-fan within two distinctly unique media channels. The model is also a helpful tool for framing an empirical investigation into the audience behavior of cyber-fans.

Hypotheses

One of the more consistently identified gratifications obtained from television viewing is social interaction (Rubin, 1981a, 1983; Towers, 1985, 1986; Wenner, 1982, 1983). People use television content as a catalyst for social interaction during exposure to television programming and after exposure in a variety of social settings. In this context, social interaction includes, but is not necessarily limited to, face-to-face communication, as well as mediated communication via electronic technologies like the telephone (Dimmick, Sikand, & Patterson, 1994; Noble, 1989; O'Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995) and the Internet (Abela, 1997; Yoo, 1996).

Cyberspace has become the newest meeting ground where people with shared interests can easily locate each other and interact in ways that were not previously possible. The Internet fills the gap between episodes of television exposure and offers the cyber-fan a greater opportunity to stay cognitively engaged with their favorite program content and characters. It is expected that this type of mediated social interaction among cyber-fans is associated with television viewing involvement at both the psychological and cognitive levels.

Rafaeli (1988) argues that the construct of interactivity "should allow for treatment of channels and media as surrogate or real 'participants' in the communication process" (p. 116). The author outlined distinctions between parasocial interaction and what he referred to as ortho-social interactions… "the increasingly popular behaviors of calling talk shows, writing letters to the editor, and otherwise using traditional, unidirectional mass media in a new, reactive, or interactive manner" (p. 124). According to this definition, fan-related interpersonal communication activity via the Internet is a form of ortho-social interaction. As Rafaeli notes,

> both para-social and ortho-social interaction were found to be positively associated with media use .... Para-social interaction was also shown, however, to contribute to a reciprocal substitution between media use and sociability, while ortho-social interaction contributed to a supplemental process. Ortho-social interactants with media (those who don't just imagine interaction) use the media to bolster their favorable disposition toward interacting with others. (p. 124)

Thus, media involvement at the psychological level (parasocial interaction) is related to 'real world' social interactions with other people (ortho-social interaction). Following this rationale, the interactivity of cyber-fans within the electronic fan culture of the Internet serves as a supplement to the television-viewing experience and as a way of extending parasocial relationships into the "real-world." Rubin and Perse (1987) found that greater amounts of parasocial interactivity among soap opera viewers was associated with a greater likelihood for discussing the show with others when it was over. Thus, the first hypothesis specifically predicts that,

H1. Interactivity will be positively associated with Parasocial Interaction.

Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1998) found that interactivity tends to be "associated with a sense of involvement and belonging" (p. 187). The more interactive the communication exchange is between participants in discussion groups, the more likely the person is to feel that they are a significant part of the group. Thus, group cohesion within on-line discussion groups is viewed in part as a function of the degree to which participants in the group communicate in more fully interactive and meaningful ways. This supports Rafaeli's (1988) earlier conclusion that "acceptance and satisfaction are the most obvious set of effects of increased interactivity sought after and documented in the literature" (p. 122). It seems reasonable to expect that the cyber-fan would derive greater satisfaction from on-line communication experiences that are more fully interactive. This leads to a second hypothesis that specifically predicts that

H2. Interactivity will be positively associated with Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction of on-line discussions.

The argument has been established that parasocial interaction and ortho-social interaction are empirically related constructs within the electronic fan culture of cyber-space. It seems reasonable to suggest that on-line interpersonal communication satisfaction would be greater for cyber-fan's who manifest a greater level of parasocial involvement with their favorite television characters. The third hypothesis is suggested in order to relate interpersonal communication satisfaction to the psychological surrogate of social interactivity. It specifically predicts that

H3. Parasocial Interaction will be positively associated with Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction of on-line discussions.

In a study of teenage television viewers, Lin (1993) found that "intentional audience activity variables were positive predictors" of interpersonal communication. Specifically, she observed that "teen viewers who are more cognitively and behaviorally involved with content during and after viewing--- from a wider variety of programs--- received more interpersonal communication gratification by utilizing the program for talking with others" (p. 45). It is likely that cyber-fans, because of their intense involvement with their favorite programs, are more highly motivated to seek out contact with other fans via the Internet and that these interactions, more often than not, lead to satisfying communication. In other words, the more involved a viewer is with his favorite television program, the more likely he will be to interpersonally interact with other fans and derive satisfaction from the exchanges that occur during on-line discussions. This study expects to find that cyber-fans will vary in their level of interactivity and interpersonal communication satisfaction depending on their level of post-viewing cognition. These predictions are specifically articulated in hypotheses four and five.

H4. Post-Viewing cognition will be positively associated with Interactivity.

H5. Post-Viewing cognition will be positively associated with Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction of on-line discussions.

Rubin and Perse (1987) concluded that "parasocial interaction, thinking about content [post-viewing cognition] and discussing content represent related, yet different, dimensions of media involvement" (p. 262). Their research identified a strong and significant empirical relationship between parasocial interaction and post-viewing cognition for fans of soap opera content. Thus, the degree to which a cyber-fan stays cognitively involved with a favorite television program should be related to her level of parasocial involvement with her favorite television character(s). The last hypothesis specifically predicts that

H6. Parasocial Interaction will be positively associated with Post-Viewing Cognition.

Method

The Internet offers researchers an efficient and practical venue for identifying niche audience segments for observation in empirical studies. For example, television fans can easily be located on the Internet by visiting newsgroups and chat rooms dedicated to the discussion of particular television programs. Television fans have also created thousands of web pages to disseminate program information to other fans of the same program. In short, the Internet provides multiple avenues of access to highly concentrated populations of cyber-fans who would be much harder to locate by random sampling the general television viewing audience or the total population of Internet users.

In order to reach the sub-population of cyber-fans and to solicit participation in the current study, the method of distributed, electronic surveying was implemented. This method of sample identification and survey administration was pioneered by researchers at the Graphics, Visualization, and Usability (GVU) Center at the Georgia Institute of Technology. The GVU Internet user surveys are the longest running on-line survey instruments of their kind. GVU administers their surveys twice a year in an effort to identify various trends associated with users of the Internet.

As an alternative to traditional methods of random selection, GVU developed an innovative approach whereby a survey is heavily promoted through various media channels inviting respondents to participate (Kehoe & Pitkow, 1996). A similar method was designed for the current study in an effort to draw a representative sample of respondents from the active population of cyber-fans within the electronic fan culture of the Internet.

- Invitations to participate in the on-line survey were posted to select newsgroups dealing with the discussion of specific television programs.
- Invitations to participate in the on-line survey were also sent (via e-mail) to a select number of individuals who have created a personal television fan page.
- A select group of television fan page authors were asked to post a link to the on-line survey instrument on their web site.
- An effort was made to solicit the participation of a select number of commercial television fan sites by asking site administrators to place a link to the on-line survey instrument on their web page.

In order to employ these strategies, criteria had to be established for the selection of television fan pages and newsgroups that would serve as the bases for launching a campaign to promote the on-line survey instrument. Once identified, the television fan pages and newsgroups served as the primary channels of access for promoting the on-line survey instrument to cyber-fans.

Criteria for Program Selection

Previous studies have focused on the fans of particular program genres such as news and soap operas. Narrowing down the sample by targeting a specific program type is a convenient way of controlling for individual differences that may be associated with genre preferences. For example, one might expect sports fans and soap opera fans to be similar in terms of a shared affinity for the television medium, but dissimilar in attributes associated with specific programming content. A goal of this study was to be as inclusive of as many cyber-fans as possible without unnecessarily restricting the sample to the fans of a single program or genre. This was done in an effort to maximize the external validity of the study. At the same time, it became obvious that some narrowing down of the cyber-fan population was necessary simply because of the broad and extensive nature of television fandom on the Internet. Cursory examination of the electronic fan culture revealed newsgroups and web sites that were associated with thousands of different television programs and a multitude of program genres.

Criteria had to be established that would systematically pare down the scope of investigation and be logically consistent with the foundational objectives of the study. The decision was made to target the on-line television fans of first-run, episodic, network or syndicated programming on U.S. television. The emphasis on first-run programming constrained the sample to fans of television shows that are still in production. To be included in the selection process, a program also had to be episodic in nature. Episodic programs are those that are either dramatic or comedic in nature and feature regularly (daily or weekly) produced episodes based on the continuous theme and characters in the program. This criterion excluded news and magazine programs, game shows, talk shows, sports programs, and other non-episodic program genres while including daytime television soap operas. It was felt that episodic programs would tend to foster a greater amount of involvement and interactivity among cyber-fans. If a person misses a particular segment of an episodic television program, they may miss important story elements that will play into future episodes or perhaps be pertinent to events that took place in previous episodes. Individual episodes are intrinsically tied to the on-going television series that never really ends until the program goes out of production. The next criterion for selection specified that the programs must be network or syndicated programming on U.S. television. Network programs are those being aired on one of the six major commercial television networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, WB (Warner-Brothers Television Network), and UPN (United Paramount Network). The decision was also made to include some of the more popular cult programs that are currently being aired on a select number of cable networks

(USA Network, HBO, and Comedy Central). Due to the fact that there are a number of popular television programs currently being produced that are not a part of the broadcast or cable network schedules, first-run syndicated programming was also included if it met all of the necessary criteria for selection.

Participation in the study was limited to the adult population. For this reason, children's programs were excluded from selection. And finally, programs that have been on the air for less than one full season were not specifically targeted for inclusion. This criterion was included because it takes some degree of time for television fandom to develop, and to gain a corresponding representation on the Internet in terms of fan pages and discussion groups.

By identifying the sample as fans of current, episodic television programs, the methodology attempted to target a representative cross-section of television fans with a diverse set of program preferences and interests. Eighty-six television shows (see Appendix A) were identified using the program selection criteria mentioned above.

Identification of Newsgroups and Fan Sites

A search of the Internet was conducted and a database of newsgroups and television fan pages associated with each of the shows selected for inclusion in the study was created. Sixty Usenet newsgroups (see Appendix B) and 806 television fan pages were also identified through the search.

The following criteria had to be met in order for a fan page to be included in the database. First, the fan page had to focus on a single television program. Second, the fan page could not be commercially associated with the creators or producers of a television program or a television network. Third, the fan page had to clearly identify the creator of the web page as an individual (as opposed to a corporation or business). Fourth, the fan page had to include the personal e-mail address of the creator of the web page. In addition, fan pages that focused primarily on actors and characters from the program (Celebrity pages) were not included.

Various search strategies were utilized to identify the collection of television fan pages. The majority of sites were found by searching television program lists available at UltimateTV.com and Yahoo.com. Both of these commercial services have created their own database of television program sites and posted them to the Internet. Webring.com was used to locate additional sites. Webring is an Internet-based service that ties together related web sites by various categories including individual television program names. Finally, conventional searches were conducted as necessary using the Metacrawler search engine. Metacrawler was chosen because of its ability to query seven of the more popular Internet search engines at a time.

Every effort was made to fairly represent each of the shows in the master program list. Some programs, such as *The X-Files*, have many more fan sites (literally hundreds) than other, less popular programs. The search, therefore, was not an exhaustive attempt to locate every fan page for every program on the master list. When at least fifty sites were located for a single program, the search for sites related to that program was terminated. While the number fifty was arbitrarily selected as a cutoff point, it was felt that this number would serve to encompass a sufficient amount of the variability associated with the fans of any one particular program. This also provided a helpful way of preventing the oversampling of any one particular type of program.

An invitation to participate in the survey was posted individually to each of the 806 e-mail addresses obtained through the television fan page search and to each of the 60 Usenet newsgroups. A follow-up posting to each of the newsgroups was made four days before the end of the data collection in an attempt to solicit participation from fans that may have missed the initial invitation. In addition to completing the survey, the authors of television fan pages were asked to post a link to the survey instrument on their personal television fan page. A custom graphic promoting the *Television Fan Survey* was included as an attachment to the e-mail message. Web page authors were encouraged to use the graphic on their pages as a link to the survey.

The on-line survey instrument was posted to the Internet from October 13 to November 7, 1998. The timing of the survey administration was strategically set to take place shortly after the start of the fall television season. On-line activity by television fans was expected to be high at this time because of the introduction of new episodes, season premieres, and the heightened efforts of television networks to market their programming.

Measurement

Six composite scales were included in the *Television Fan Survey* to measure television-viewing involvement and the on-line communication activity of cyber-fans. Favorite program affinity, parasocial interaction, and post-viewing cognition were used as multidimensional measures of television-viewing involvement. Internet affinity, interactivity, and interpersonal communication satisfaction were selected for measuring multiple dimensions of the online communication activity of the cyber-fan. Each of the items in these scales used a standard 5-point Likert-style response option anchored by *Strongly Disagree* and *Strongly Agree*.

Viewing Involvement Measures

Television viewing involvement variables were measured with three scales that have long been associated with the uses and gratifications approach to understanding audience behavior. The wording for each of the items in these scales was modified from the original versions of the scale in order to reflect the needs of the current study. The phase *"favorite television program"* or *"favorite television character"* was added in an effort to focus respondents on their involvement with their favorite television show rather than upon television viewing in a more general sense.

Favorite Program Affinity

Affinity was conceptualized as a dependency variable that reflects the degree of importance that people assign to their favorite television programs. The scale was adapted from a previous one used in other uses and gratification studies (Abelman, 1989; Rubin, 1981a, 1983) to measure the audience's affinity with the television medium in general. The five scale items were modified to reflect affinity with favorite television programs. This was done in order to be consistent with the belief that the cyber-fan's involvement with television is more closely linked to specific programming content then with the medium as a whole. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the following items in the affinity scale.

1. Watching my favorite television program is one of the more important things I do.
2. If the television set wasn't working, I would really miss my favorite television program.
3. Watching my favorite television program is very important in my life.
4. I could easily do without watching my favorite television program for several weeks.
5. I would feel lost without my favorite television program to watch.

Parasocial Interaction

Rubin (1994) noted that Parasocial Interaction (PSI) "is a relationship of friendship or intimacy by a media consumer with remote media 'persona' (Horton & Wohl, 1956). It is based on affective ties of audience members with media personalities (Levy, 1979)" (p. 273). PSI was measured in the current study by using a 10-item version of the original PSI scale (Perse & Rubin, 1989; Perse, 1990; Conway & Rubin, 1991). The scale was adapted to reflect PSI with the respondent's "favorite television character." The 10-item version of the PSI scale is a shortened adaptation of the original 20-item measure. Respondents were encouraged to think about a single (favorite) television character before responding to each of the following PSI items.

1. I feel sorry for my favorite television character when he or she makes a mistake.
2. My favorite television character makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.
3. I see my favorite television character as a natural, down-to-earth person.
4. I look forward to watching my favorite television character on this week's episode.
5. If my favorite television character appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program.
6. I miss seeing my favorite television character when they are not on TV.
7. My favorite television character seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
8. I would like to meet my favorite television character in person.
9. I find my favorite television character to be attractive.
10. If there were a story about my favorite television character in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.

Post-Viewing Cognition

Post-Viewing Cognition was conceptualized as the degree to which an individual continues to think about a program and various program elements after viewing is complete. Post-viewing cognition was measured by adapting a four-item scale developed by Rubin and Perse (1987). Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the following items in the post-viewing cognition scale.

1. After viewing my favorite television program, I spend a lot of time thinking about what happened in the story.
2. After viewing my favorite television program, I spend a lot of time thinking about what I saw or heard.
3. After viewing my favorite television program, I spend a lot of time thinking about what will happen in the next episode.
4. After viewing my favorite television program, I spend a lot of time thinking about the characters.

Internet Activity Measures

The cyber-fans interpersonal communication activity via the Internet was measured using three scales. These scales attempted to measure the respondent's affinity for the Internet, the level of interactivity during on-line interpersonal communication with others, and the degree to which such communication is a satisfying experience.

Internet Affinity

Internet affinity was conceptualized as a global dependency measure of the individual's reliance on the Internet. Items were borrowed from the favorite program affinity scale and modified to reflect the felt importance of the Internet. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the five items in the affinity scale.

1. Using the Internet is one of the more important things I do each day.
2. If my Internet connection wasn't working, I would really miss it.
3. The Internet is very important in my life.
4. I could easily do without logging onto the Internet for several weeks.
5. I would feel lost without my Internet access.

Interactivity

The interactivity scale was based on Rafaeli's tri-part conceptualization of interactivity----from one-way non-interactive to fully interactive communication and exchange (Rafaeli, 1988). Rafaeli (1988) defines interactivity as "an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmission" (p. 111). A 20-item interactivity scale was constructed and pre-tested prior to the final administration of the survey. Factor analysis was used to analyze and reduce the scale from 20-items to 12-items. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the following items in the interactivity scale.

1. I like to share my personal opinions with other people during on-line discussions.
2. I have very little interest in sharing my ideas with others on the internet.
3. I use the Internet primarily as a vehicle for interacting with other people.
4. I like seeing what other people in the discussion group think about my ideas.
5. Other people's comments during an on-line discussion often triggers in me an urge to respond.
6. Communicating with other people on-line is important to me.
7. I like to avoid on-line discussions of any kind.
8. I like interacting with other people on the Internet.
9. I like to contribute messages to discussion groups.
10. I may contribute multiple times to a message thread that interests me.
11. I do not like to participate in on-going discussion topics or threads on the Internet.
12. I love to talk with others on-line.

Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction

Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction (ICS) has been conceptualized "as the positive reinforcement provided by a communication event that fulfills positive expectations" (Graham, 1994, p. 217). ICS is usually viewed within this context as an outcome of communication activity. The current study attempted to measure cyber-fan's satisfaction with their on-line communication activity via the Internet. ICS was measured using a 10-item version of Hecht's (1978) 19-item ICS scale. The scale was shortened in an effort to minimize the overall length of the survey instrument. The items in the scale were adapted to reflect on-line interpersonal communication activity. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the following 10 items in the ICS scale.

1. I am very satisfied with conversations I have with other people on the Internet.
2. Other people on the Internet express a lot of interest in what I have to say.
3. I feel like I can talk about anything with other people on the Internet.
4. Each person gets to say what they want on the Internet.
5. Other people frequently say things during Internet discussions which add little to the conversation.
6. People often talk about things I am not interested in during Internet discussions.
7. Other people let me know when I am communicating effectively on-line.
8. Nothing is accomplished talking to other people on-line.
9. Other people genuinely want to get to know me on-line.
10. Other people show me that they understand what I said on the Internet.

Results

A total of 3,242 surveys were received during the 26 days that the *Television Fan Survey* was posted to the Internet. The completed surveys were examined and 201 cases were discarded leaving a total of 3,041 usable surveys. The discarded surveys were either blank submissions or duplicates resulting from respondents who submitted their survey more than once. The respondent's IP address along with the date and time that the survey submission occurred were used to identify duplicate entries. In each case, the duplicate entries were individually verified and discarded leaving only one completed survey per respondent. The large majority of the respondents in the study were female (64.5%, $N = 1922$) as opposed to male (35.5%, $N = 1057$).

Of the 806 e-mail invitations that were sent out to the creators of television fan pages, 43 were returned as undelivered because of an invalid e-mail address. Of the remaining 763, forty-seven agreed to place a link to the survey on their personal fan page. In addition, UltimateTV.com posted a link to the survey for a period of one week. The link was positioned on their Daily Television News page, one of the most heavily visited pages on their site.

Respondents were asked to indicate how they linked to the survey. 51.5% indicated linking to the survey via a newsgroup posting; 25.6% said they linked to the survey from a television web page; 14.5% linked to the survey from a personal e-mail message; and 8.9% selected the "other" option. It is not clear what "other" methods people may have used to link to the survey, however, it is clear that word of the survey spread through other channels not necessarily associated with the original sampling methodology.

Cyber-Fan Demographics

The demographics of the cyber-fan sample were compared to those of the general Internet population as reported in the ninth GVU (Georgia Tech Research Center, 1998) World Wide Web User Survey. These apples to apple comparisons provided a visual contrast of the demographic characteristics of the two sample populations. Graphical overlays are provided for each demographic trait in order to observe the comparisons. The current sample of cyber-fans appears to be largely representative of the general Internet population in three out of the five categories that were measured.

Figure 2 displays the summary frequency data on gender for all of the respondents completing the *Television Fan Survey*. As the data show, a large majority of the respondents in the study were female (64.5%, *N* = 1922). This compares to only 35.5% (*N* = 1057) of the subjects who were male.

This rather large representation of female respondents stands in stark contrast to previous GVU studies that have consistently found males to be the dominant gender in cyberspace. As Figure 2 illustrates, the general Internet sample from the most recent GVU survey is virtually a mirror image of the cyber-fan sample from the current study. GVU reported that 61.3 percent of their sample population was male, while only 38.7% were female.

Figure 3 displays the summary frequency data on age for all of the respondents completing the *Television Fan Survey*. Since age was measured categorically using thirteen different response options, it was not possible to compute a true average for the cyber-fan sample. Instead, a weighted average was computed using the median value for each of the age categories. The last category was averaged in using 85 as the age value since no median value was possible. Using this method, the average age of the cyber-fan is slightly younger (*M* = 31.6) than respondents from the general Internet population (*M* = 35.1). However, both studies show a definitive skew towards youth in general. 72.8% of the cyber-fans are under forty years of age. Only 4.7% of the subjects are older than 50. And the largest single age category is 18-20 year olds who comprised 18.1% of the sample population.

Figure 4 displays the summary frequency data on the education of cyber-fans that completed the *Television Fan Survey*. These data indicate that the majority of cyber-fans have experienced at least some level of college education. As Figure 4 suggests, these findings are in line with previous surveys of the general Internet population.

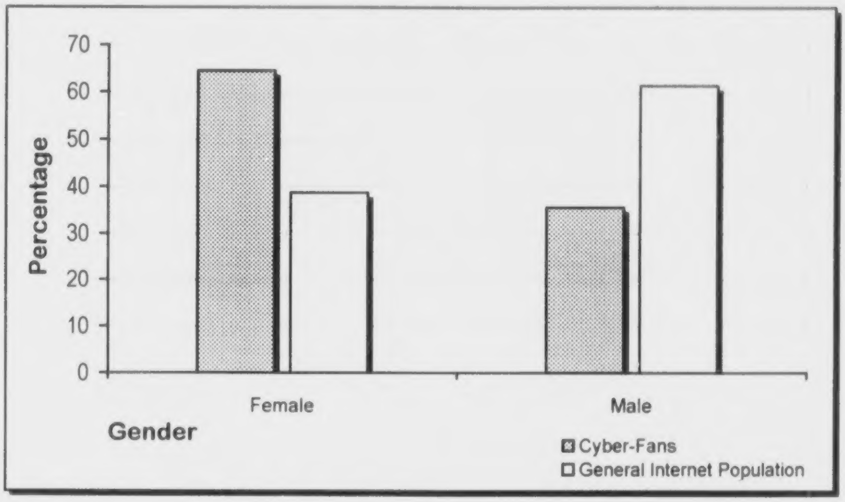

Figure 2: Cyber-Fans vs. General Internet Population (Gender)[1]

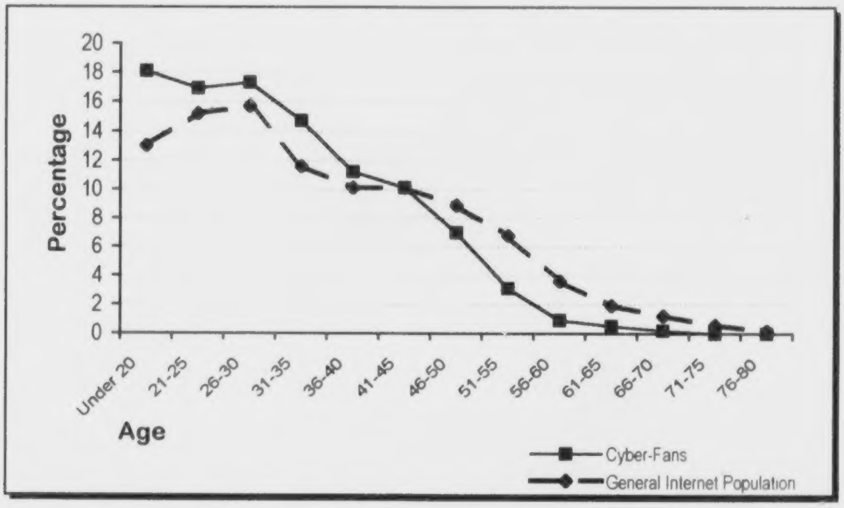

Figure 3: Cyber-Fans vs. General Internet Population (Age)[2]

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[1] *Data for the General Internet Population obtained from Georgia Tech Research Center. (1998). GVU's 9th WWW user survey. [Online] Available: http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-04/ [1998, November 10].*

[2] *Data for the General Internet Population obtained from Georgia Tech Research Center. (1998). GVU's 9th WWW user survey. [Online] Available: http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-04/ [1998, November 10].*

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The top two categories of education in both samples are college graduates and those indicating at least some degree of college instruction. 64.7% of cyber-fans are in one of these two categories. This compares to 61.1% of the respondents in the general Internet population. 83.9% of cyber-fans report some degree of post-secondary education as compared to 84.9% in the general Internet population.

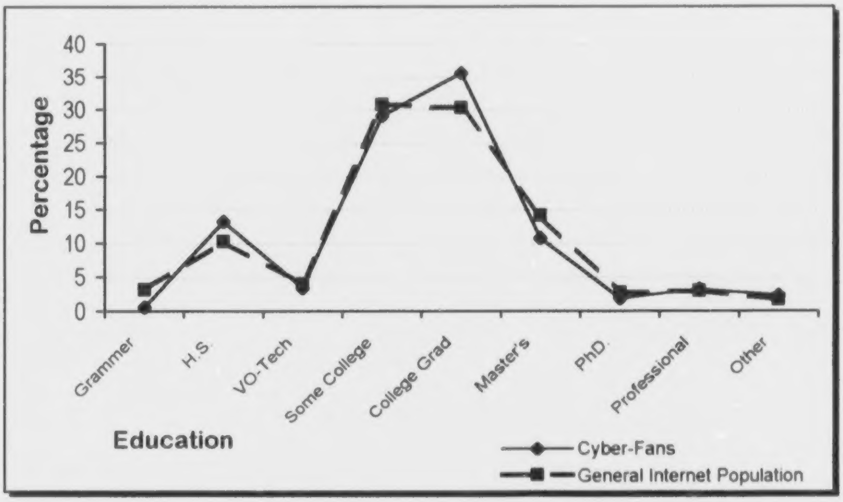

Figure 4: Cyber-Fans vs. General Internet Population (Education)[3]

The frequency data on the annual household income of cyber-fans is provided in Figure 5. A large number of the respondents (30.7%) refused to indicate their income level by selecting the *'rather not say!'* option. In terms of reported annual household income, cyber-fans appear to be slightly better off than the general population (see Figure 5). 70.5% of cyber-fans report an annual household income of $30,000 or higher. This compares to 62.4% in the general Internet population. However, Figure 5 shows a fairly consistent parallel in the income distribution across all income levels for both groups.

The last demographic variable to be examined is marital status. Single and married people form the two largest segments of both sample populations. However, while single people comprise the largest segment of the cyber-fan sample (54.2%), they only represent 38.7% of the general Internet population (see Figure 6). Likewise, married

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[3] *Data for the General Internet Population obtained from Georgia Tech Research Center. (1998). GVU's 9th WWW user survey. [Online]. Available: http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-04/ [1998, November 10].*

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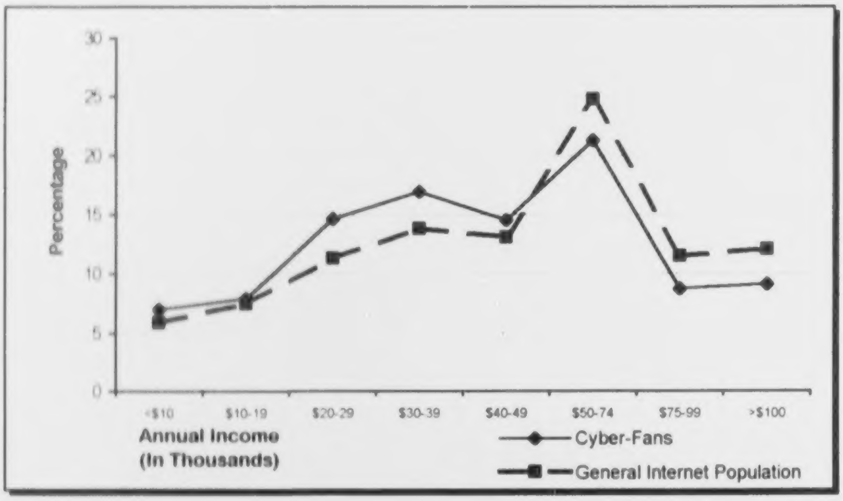

Figure 5: Cyber-Fans vs. General Internet Population (Annual Income)[4]

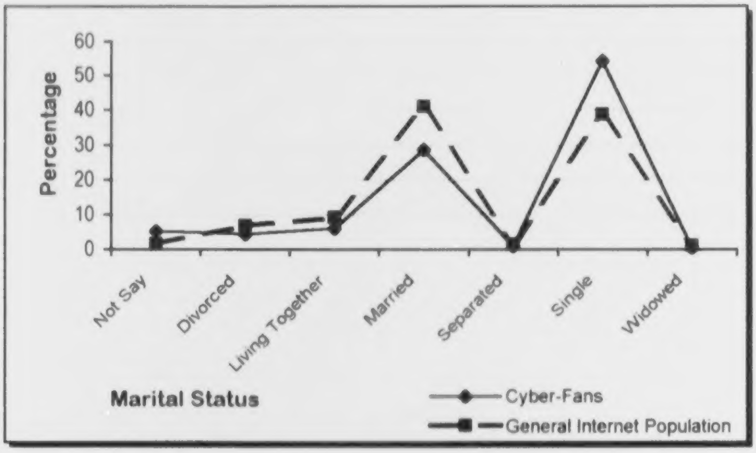

Figure 6: Cyber-Fans vs. General Internet Population (Marital Status)[5]

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[4] *Data for the General Internet Population obtained from Georgia Tech Research Center. (1998). GVU's 9th WWW user survey. [Online]. Available: http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-04/ [1998, November 10].*

[5] *Data for the General Internet Population obtained from Georgia Tech Research Center. (1998). GVU's 9th WWW user survey. [Online]. Available: http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-04/ [1998, November 10].*

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people are most highly represented in the general Internet population (41.1%) while the percentage of cyber-fans that say they are married is only 28.1%.

Hypothesis Testing

The distribution of scores for each of the activity variables was examined for departures from normality. The analysis revealed mild to moderate patterns of skewness (usually in a negative direction) for each of the composite indexes. However, this was expected given the rather extreme television fandom of the sample population. Because of the large number of cases (3,041), the skewness of the distributions was not considered a threat to the statistical power of the study nor the generalizability of the results.

A summary of the data for each of the activity variables in the *Television Fan Survey* is provided in Table 1. In addition, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients were computed for each of the scales as follows: *Favorite Program Affinity* (α=.88); *Internet Affinity* (α=.87); *Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction* (α=.81); *Interactivity* (α=.94); *Parasocial Interaction* (α=.88); and *Post-Viewing Cognition* (α=.93).

Table 1: Descriptive Summary of Activity Variables

Descriptive Statistics

	N	*Min*	*Max*	*M*		*SD*	*Skewness*		*Kurtosis*	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	*SE*	Statistic	Statistic	*SE*	Statistic	*SE*
IA	2975	1 00	5 00	3 803	018	966	- 673	045	- 314	090
PSI	2870	1 00	5 00	3 684	015	819	- 411	046	- 412	091
PVC	2934	1 00	5 00	3 558	020	1 105	- 483	045	- 698	090
FPA	2929	1 00	5 00	3 441	020	1 058	- 291	045	- 791	090
Interactivity	2802	1 00	5 00	3 292	019	1 021	- 417	046	- 666	092
ICS	2842	1 00	5 00	3 158	013	703	- 163	046	- 232	092
Valid N (listwise)	2547									

Each of the six hypotheses essentially predicted that the cyber-fan's involvement with the viewing of their favorite television programs is related to their interpersonal communication activities via the Internet. Figure 7 displays the correlation coefficients for each of the television viewing and interpersonal communication variables within an Integrative Model of Cyber-Fan Involvement. The model shows both the zero-order, Pearson Product-

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Moment correlation coefficients as well as the forth-order partials controlling for age, gender, amount of television use, and Internet use (Rubin & Perse, 1987).

The first hypothesis predicted that interactivity would be positively associated with parasocial interaction. As Figure 7 reveals, the analysis found a significant and moderately strong association between these two variables ($r = .339$, $p < .01$) thus providing some level of support for the hypothesis. Hypothesis number two predicted a positive association between interactivity and interpersonal communication satisfaction ($r = .750$, $p < .01$).The exceptionally strong association between these two variables provides ample evidence in support of the second hypothesis.

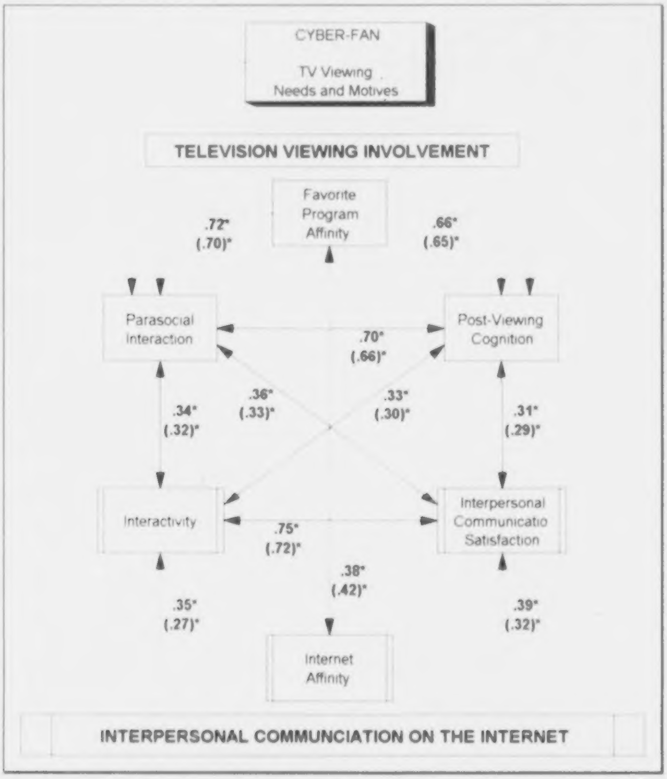
CYBER-FAN
TV Viewing
Needs and Motives
TELEVISION VIEWING INVOLVEMENT
Favorite Program Affinity
.72* (.70)*
.66* (.65)*
Parasocial Interaction
Post-Viewing Cognition
.70* (.66)*
.36* (.33)*
.33* (.30)*
.34* (.32)*
.31* (.29)*
Interactivity
Interpersonal Communicatio Satisfaction
.75* (.72)*
.38* (.42)*
.35* (.27)*
.39* (.32)*
Internet Affinity
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNCIATION ON THE INTERNET

Figure 7: Correlation Coefficients for Cyber-Fan Activity Variables[6]

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[6] * *Zero-order Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients*
** *Forth-order partial coefficients controlling for age, gender, amount of television use, and amount of Internet use*

Hypothesis 3 was also supported by the data analysis which revealed a moderately strong and positive association between post-viewing cognition and interactivity ($r = .331$, $p < .01$). In order to test the fourth hypothesis, post-viewing cognition was also compared to interpersonal communication satisfaction ($r = .312$, $p < .01$). As the data show, hypothesis four was successful in predicting a positive association between the two variables.

The fifth hypothesis was successful in predicting a positive association between parasocial interaction and interpersonal communication satisfaction ($r = .357$, $p < .01$). And finally, a strong and positive association was identified between parasocial interaction and post-viewing cognition ($r = .692$, $p < .01$) in support of the sixth hypothesis.

Each of the associations that were predicted in the model is statistically significant and moderate to strong in size. These data provide a great deal of support for the use of an integrative model for understanding the relationships between television viewing involvement and interpersonal communication activity within the electronic fan culture of the Internet.

While not specifically predicted, it was also encouraging to see evidence of a relationship between each of the affinity measures and corresponding variables associated with both television viewing and Internet activity. A strong, positive association exists between favorite program affinity and parasocial interaction ($r = .718$, $p < .01$) and post-viewing cognition($r = .658$, $p < .01$). While less pronounced, significant associations were also observed between Internet affinity and interactivity ($r = .351$, $p < .01$) and interpersonal communication satisfaction ($r = .393$, $p < .01$).

The analysis also revealed a statistically significant relationship between favorite program affinity and Internet affinity ($r = .375$, $p < .01$). While this was not expected, it seems plausible that within the television fan culture of the Internet, such a relationship would exist. The cyber-fan's affinity for the Internet not only serves to extend viewing involvement, but it may also contribute to a greater dependency on and affinity for favorite television programs.

Discussion

The research methodology was designed to empirically test for specific relationships between each of the variables associated with television viewing involvement and the on-line interpersonal communication of the cyber-fan. The six hypotheses were cast within an integrative model of cyber-fan activity that predicted empirical links between the television world of the cyber-fan and the on-line communication environment of the Internet. The model received a great deal of support from the data that were generated by the *Television Fan Survey*. Each of the six activity-related hypotheses was successful in predicting significant and positive associations between the specified variables in the model.

Television-viewing involvement was conceptualized as a multidimensional and variable construct encompassing parasocial interaction, post-viewing cognition, and favorite television program affinity. The current study identified significant empirical links between each of the television involvement variables and the three activity variables associated with the cyber-fan's on-line interpersonal communication. These links support the underlying theoretical assumptions of the uses and dependency model, which predicts a relationship between the individual's use of mass media and supplemental activity through alternative channels of communication. This study helps to confirm the existence of a symbiotic relationship between the utilization of mass media content and supplemental communication activities via the Internet. The word symbiotic is used because it seems to encapsulate the reciprocal nature of a relationship of mutual dependence upon two media channels without necessitating a cause and effect relationship.

The fact that interactivity was found to be positively associated with both parasocial interaction and post-viewing cognition is encouraging and lends support to Rafaeli and Sudweek's (1998) notion that interactivity is a hybrid construct that serves as a "bridge between mass and interpersonal communication" (p. 175). While the data do not specify causal direction, the results support the idea of a reciprocal relationship between television viewing and on-line supplemental activities related to the cyber-fan's dependency upon specific television programs. In the case of parasocial interaction, Rubin (1994) summarized that

> investigators have usually treated PSI as an outcome of interaction potential and media behavior (e.g., Rosengren & Windahl, 1972). Levy (1979) suggested that the causal direction is from exposure to PSI, but that those who find these relationships gratifying then increase their exposure to expand their contact with a persona. (p. 275)

This view is consistent with the uses and dependency model, which views television-viewing involvement and dependency as a conceptual antecedent to the use of alternative channels for supplementing the viewing experience. The supplemental activity then contributes to increasing the viewer's dependency on the television medium or specified program. This results in an on-going cycle of activity in which both mass media and on-line communication behavior are mutually reinforced by the positive gratifications of each channel.

Looking at it from a humanist perspective, on-line interpersonal communication activity may serve to mediate the viewer's involvement with their favorite shows by prescribing "the manner in which conversational interaction as an iterative process leads to jointly produced meaning" (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1998, p. 175). One cyber-fan made the comment that

> being in a discussion group about a show, where the plot, characters, etc are analyzed after each episode, is a lot like being in a book club where you read a book each week. You get a lot more out the show after reading other people's reactions and opinions, and if you don't understand something, there's always someone who can explain.

The electronic fan culture of the Internet seems to offer a diverse and interactive environment where shared meaning and insight contribute to a richer viewing experience for the cyber-fan. As Massey (1995) discovered, audience activity can transcend fixed periods of actual exposure to media content. She specifically found that "important activity can occur or is constantly being developed without the prerequisite of exposure and that audience members can be actively involved with the media creating meanings outside or away from encounters with specific texts" (Massey, 1995, p. 345).

This design of this study required that a comparison be made between several attributes associated with television-viewing involvement and interpersonal communication activity via the Internet. Chaffee and Mutz (1988) suggested that

> the assumption that two kinds of channels are comparable implies in turn that the research on them involves measurement of each in a way that permits juxtaposing one against the other.... Indeed, in the case of communication contexts as different in nature as personal interaction and mass media, absolute comparability is all but impossible. (p. 24)

While television viewing and communication activity via the Internet are contextually different in nature, the current study initiated a method of comparison that was centered upon similarities in the content and uses of two media channels that are conceptually related by virtue of their mutual association with television fandom. By doing so, this study has found a way to empirically observe and compare communication activity across multiple channels. The current investigation also produced a conceptual model and a methodological approach that can be adapted to future studies of mass media, the Internet, and interpersonal communication.

The current investigation marks the first known time that interactivity and interpersonal communication satisfaction have been used within a uses and dependency framework in an effort to empirically document associations between mass media use and on-line interpersonal communication. The interactivity scale which was created for this study received high marks for reliability (α=.94). The data analysis supported previous research, which has consistently identified interactivity as a variable construct (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1998). A few selected comments from cyber-fans are presented here in an effort to corroborate this point.

Cyber-fans were found to vary in their desire for interactive communication within on-line discussion groups. At one end of the interactive continuum are the so-called lurkers as described in the following comments.

> My Internet use is more to get away from people than to interact with them. But I do like to read what others think!
>
> I don't give my opinions in discussions. I'm a lurker. I like to read other peoples opinions, hear other points of view on a character, a show, [or] a topic presented in one of my favorite shows.

Other cyber-fans appear to thrive on the potential benefits of interacting with other fans within on-line discussion groups.

> The Internet has helped change following a TV show from something passive into something interactive. Discussing my favorite show online has become part of the experience of watching it.

In an exploratory study of bulletin board use, James, Wotring, and Forrest (1995) admonished researchers to design studies that would effectively include lurkers. The current study was apparently successful in this regard by drawing a diverse sample that varied considerably in their level of interactivity with others. While some self-described lurkers show disdain at the thought of interacting with others, this does not necessarily preclude them from participating in an anonymous on-line survey.

One thing that was not particularly measured in the current study was how interactivity might vary within the individual channels of the Internet. The current study measured interactivity as a global construct that reflects general on-line communication behavior. However, one respondent indicated that their level of interactivity tends to vary across Internet channels.

> While I participate fully in IRC discussions (chat rooms), enjoying the give and take of ideas, I'm a "lurker" elsewhere. I read newsgroups the way I would letters to the editor in my local newspaper, skimming them

> daily for anything that looks interesting but not contributing anything of my own. I'm only slightly more involved in mailing lists to which I've subscribed, though I read them more thoroughly and often respond to threads privately when appropriate.

While the variable of interactivity was successful in differentiating the on-line communication behavior of cyber-fans, future research should expand on the current study to more fully explore and identify the underlying reasons for this variance. The current study has apparently just broken the surface in its use of interactivity for explaining the audience behavior of cyber-fans. And while an empirical link was found between interactivity the cyber-fan's involvement with their favorite television programs, the intricate dynamics of this relationship need further exploration.

External Validity

The findings of this study are narrowly generalized to a specific segment of television fandom, and not to the global population of television fans. An important question to ask is whether the methodology was effective in reaching a representative sample of cyber-fans?

Several validity checks were introduced into the methodology in an effort to assess the effectiveness of the sampling process. The first was alluded to in the previous chapter where comparisons were made between cyber-fans and people in the general Internet population. The GVU Internet User Surveys have been conducted bi-annually since 1994. Their methodology has consistently produced trend data on the general Internet population of World Wide Web users. With the exception of gender and marital status, the cyber-fan sample matched up very well to the general Internet population. While the cyber-fan sample was found to be more heavily composed of female respondents and single people, this alone was not deemed to be a sufficient reason for dismissing the validity of the sample. Other validity checks were built into the design of the study, which provided logical support for this conclusion.

External validity was partially confirmed by the diversity of programs that fans associated themselves with. While the sampling methodology centered on 86 television program titles, the fans that took the survey identified 498 additional programs as among their personal favorites. Many of these programs also included genres that were excluded from the original selection criteria such as talk shows, sports programs, and news. The broad range and diversity of television fandom expressed by the respondents in this study tends to support the external validity of the sample.

Attention was also given to the task of tracking how respondents came to the on-line survey instrument. Respondents came to hear about the survey through a diverse set of messages and links sprinkled throughout the social networks of television fans on the Internet. Some fans reported back via e-mail that they had re-posted the invitation to participate in the survey on other mailing lists and discussion boards that they were a part of. Cyber-fans took an active part in extending word about the survey to other participants within their on-line social network. Approximately half of the participants heard about the survey through a posted message to an Internet newsgroup. Approximately twenty-five percent of the respondents linked to the survey from a television fan page or web site. The remaining participants heard about the survey through an e-mail post or some other method of contact. The diversity of access to the survey instrument was encouraging and lends partial support to the idea that the sample is indeed a valid one.

Finally, the large number of respondents would seem to give strength to the argument for accepting the validity of the current sample. The practice of oversampling the population has been suggested as a partial compensation for the lack of randomization in on-line sampling methodologies. The large number of cases in the current study is encouraging and no doubt accounts for a great amount of the variability associated with television fandom on the Internet. While it may be necessary to be somewhat conservative in generalizing the results of this study to the larger population of cyber-fans, these observations provide some reassurance that the sample is indeed representative.

Conclusion

This research project began as an attempt to explore the rather unfamiliar world of the cyber-fan and to look at ways in which the Internet was extending viewer's involvement with their favorite television programs. To this end, the current study represents only a modest beginning. While it is clear that the Internet enhances the television viewing experience, it is not an across-the-board phenomenon. Just as people use television for distinctly different purposes, Internet users selectively choose various channels at various times for various purposes. Cyber-fans are not uniformly equivalent in their desire to interact with other people about their favorite television program. While some people embrace the social networking opportunities provided through the Internet, others deplore them as a tremendous waste of time. For them, the Internet is nothing more than a tool for information acquisition.

Regardless of the reasons, the Internet has fast become a potent communication channel for extending the gratifications of television viewing. The current study discovered a very active segment of the television audience that is using the Internet as an extension of their involvement with their favorite television programs. No doubt, television fans have always found ways to acquire information about their favorite programs and television celebrities. Fan clubs and magazines have been around since the early days of television. But never before has a single medium been able to provide such a diverse venue of opportunity for supplementing the television viewing experience and building social networks around television fandom. The Internet offers researchers an opportunity to observe these social networks in action and to study both the interaction of people as well as the interaction of media and content in the new communication age. The Internet also provides an avenue of access that was not previously possible. And if the current study is any indication, cyber-fans appear to be very willing to participate in on-line survey research.

The cyber-fan is a fascinating unit of analysis for future research. If mass communication researchers are timid about crossing over into the alien worlds of computer-mediated and interpersonal communication, they only have to look to the cyber-fan to lead the way. Cyber-fans are technological entrepreneurs who have broken the constraints of traditional mass media. They are pushing the envelope of opportunity in the virtual domain of cyber-space. Researchers need to push the envelope as well. The future is ripe with opportunities to recast and reshape the theories of human communication… the byproduct of which could be integrative theories that more fully encompass the diversity of communication that has become the everyday repertoire of the Internet.

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Appendix A

Master Television Program List

Master Television Program List

Animated Comedy

King of the Hill	FOX
South Park	Cable - Comedy Central
The Simpsons	FOX

Comedy

3rd Rock From the Sun	NBC
Boy Meets World	ABC
Caroline in the City	NBC
Clueless	UPN
Cosby	CBS
Dharma & Greg	ABC
Drew Carey	ABC
Everybody Loves Raymond	CBS
For Your Love	WB
Frasier	NBC
Friends	FOX
Getting Personal	FOX
Home Improvement	ABC
Just Shoot Me	NBC
Mad About You	NBC
Malcolm & Eddie	UPN
Moesha	UPN
Mr. Show with Bob and David	Cable - HBO
NewsRadio	NBC
Sabrina the Teenage Witch	ABC
Sister, Sister	WB
Smart Guy	WB
Spin City	ABC
Suddenly Susan	NBC
The Jamie Foxx Show	WB
The Nanny	CBS
The Steve Harvey Show	WB
The Wayans Brothers	WB
Two Guys, A Girl and a Pizza Place	ABC
Unhappily Ever After	UPN
Veronica's Closet	NBC
Working	NBC

Drama

7th Heaven	WB
Ally McBeal	FOX
Baywatch	USA Network
Beverly Hills 90210	FOX
Buffy, the Vampire Slayer	WB
Chicago Hope	CBS
Dawson's Creek	WB
Diagnosis Murder	CBS
Early Edition	CBS
ER	NBC
Hercules: The Legendary Journeys	USA Network
Highlander	Syndication
Homicide: Life on the Streets	NBC
Jag	CBS
La Femme Nikita	USA Network
Law & Order	NBC
Love Boat: The Next Wave	UPN
Melrose Place	FOX
Millennium	FOX
Nash Bridges	CBS
Nightman	Syndication
NYPD Blue	ABC
Pacific Blue	Syndication
Party of Five	FOX
Pensacola (Wings of Gold)	Syndication
Profiler	NBC
Promised Land	CBS
PSI Factor: Chronicles of the Paranormal	Syndication
S.O.F. Special Ops Force	Syndication
Silk Stalkings	Syndication
The Practice	ABC
The Pretender	NBC
The X-Files	FOX
Touched by and Angel	CBS
Walker, Texas Ranger	CBS
Xena	Syndication

Sci-Fi

Babylon 5	Cable - TNT
Earth: Final Conflict	Syndication
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine	Syndication
Star Trek: Voyager	UPN

Soap Opera

All My Children	ABC
Another World	NBC
As the World Turns	CBS
Days of Our Lives	NBC
General Hospital	ABC
Guiding Light	CBS
One Life to Live	ABC
Port Charles	ABC
Sunset Beach	NBC

The Bold and the Beautiful	CBS
The Young and the Restless	CBS

Appendix B

Sample E-Mail Post

Sample E-Mail Invitation Sent to 806 Authors of Television Fan Page

I am a doctoral student in the College of Communications at the University of Tennessee and a faculty member at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, NC. I am conducting a survey of television fans and their use of the Internet for keeping up with their favorite TV programs. I recently visited your X-Files web site and would like to invite you to take the TV Fan Survey. You may take the survey now by clicking on the link below. It only takes around 10 minutes or so to complete.

http://152.44.9.23/fan_survey/weblink.shtml

In an effort to reach as many on-line television fans as possible, I am also asking site owners like yourself if you would help me to promote the survey to other TV Fans who visit your site. I have attached a graphic file (GIF) that you can place on your home page if you are willing to do so. It is an attractive and simple graphic of a television set that says TV Fan Survey. You simply have to link the graphic to the URL given above. By doing so, you will help us to reach a much broader cross-section of on-line television fans. I would like to promote the survey through November 7th (approximately 4 weeks) to give people ample opportunity to respond. The survey will be discontinued after this time.

This is a non-commercial, academic research effort to study the world of the on-line TV fan. If you choose to participate in this study, all information obtained will be strictly protected and will not be given to any outside parties or individuals. Please let me know if you are able to add the survey link to your web site.

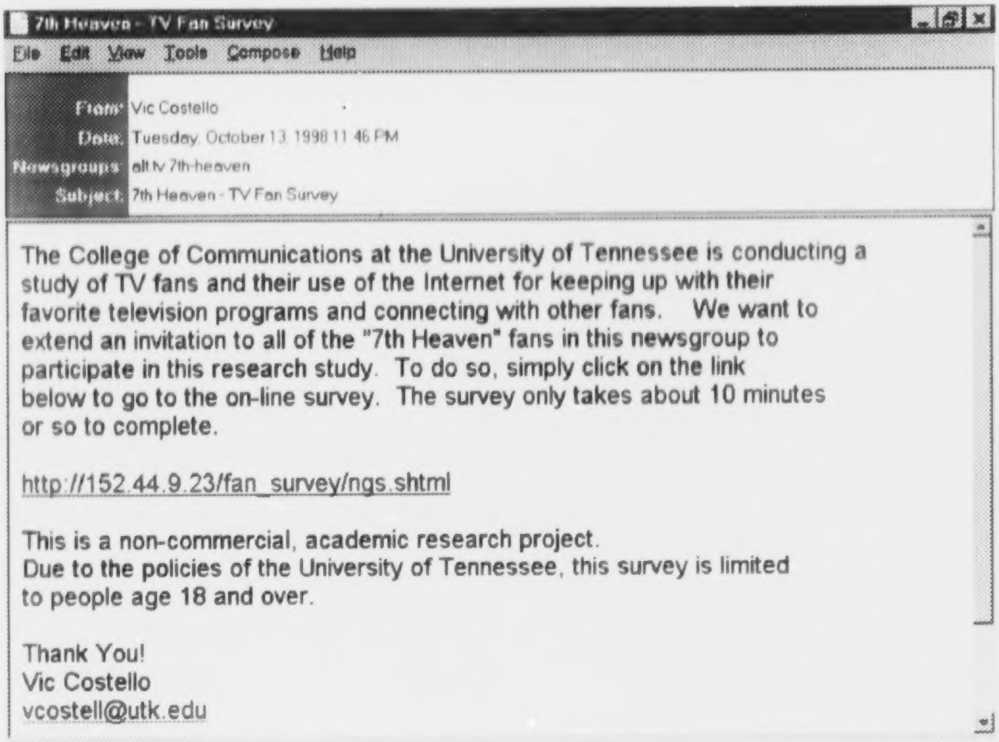
Sincerely,
Vic Costello

vcostell@utk.edu
(704) 434-4391

Appendix C

Sample Newsgroup Post

Sample Invitation Sent to 60 Usenet Television Program Newsgroups



From: Vic Costello
Date: Tuesday, October 13, 1998 11:46 PM
Newsgroups: alt.tv.7th-heaven
Subject: 7th Heaven - TV Fan Survey

The College of Communications at the University of Tennessee is conducting a study of TV fans and their use of the Internet for keeping up with their favorite television programs and connecting with other fans. We want to extend an invitation to all of the "7th Heaven" fans in this newsgroup to participate in this research study. To do so, simply click on the link below to go to the on-line survey. The survey only takes about 10 minutes or so to complete.

http://152.44.9.23/fan_survey/ngs.shtml

This is a non-commercial, academic research project.
Due to the policies of the University of Tennessee, this survey is limited to people age 18 and over.

Thank You!
Vic Costello
vcostell@utk.edu

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Appendix D

Newsgroups Included in Survey Invitation

- 3rd Rock From the Sun
  - alt.tv.3rd-rock

- 7th Heaven
  - alt.tv.7th-heaven

- All My Children
  - alt.tv.all-my-children

- Ally McBeal
  - alt.tv.ally-mcbeal

- Another World
  - alt.tv.another-world

- Babylon 5
  - alt.tv.babylon-5
  - rec.arts.sf.tv.babylon5
  - rec.arts.sf.tv.babylon5.info

- Baywatch
  - alt.tv.baywatch

- Beverly Hills 90210
  - alt.tv.90210
  - alt.tv.bh90210

- Buffy, the Vampire Slayer
  - alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer
  - alt.tv.buffy-v-slayer.creative

- Caroline in the City
  - alt.tv.caroline-city

- Chicago Hope
  - alt.tv.chicago-hope

- Dawson's Creek
  - alt.tv.dawsons-creek

- Days of Our Lives
  - alt.tv.days-of-our-lives
- Dharma & Greg
  - alt.tv.dharma-greg

- Early Edition
  - alt.tv.early-edition

- Earth: Final Conflict
  - alt.tv.earth-final-conflict

- ER
  - alt.tv.er

- Frasier
  - alt.tv.frasier

- Friends
  - alt.tv.friends

- General Hospital
  - alt.tv.general-hospital

- Hercules: The Legendary Journeys
  - alt.tv.hercules-legendary-journeys

- Highlander
  - alt.tv.highlander

- Home Improvement
  - alt.tv.home-imprvment

- Homicide: Life on the Streets
  - alt.tv.homicide

- King of the Hill
  - alt.tv.king-of-hill

- La Femme Nikita
  - alt.tv.lafemme-nikita

- Law & Order
  - alt.tv.law-and-order

- Mad About You
  - alt.tv.mad-about-you

- Melrose Place
  - alt.tv.melrose-place

- Millennium
  - alt.tv.millenium
  - alt.tv.millennium

- NewsRadio
  - alt.tv.newsradio

- NYPD Blue
  - alt.tv.nypd-blue

- Party of Five
  - alt.tv.party-of-five

- Port Charles
  - alt.tv.port-charles

- Profiler
  - alt.tv.profiler

- Sabrina the Teenage Witch
  - alt.tv.sabrina

- Silk Stalkings
  - alt.tv.silk-stalkings

- Soap Operas
  - alt.tv.daytime-shows
  - rec.arts.tv.soaps.abc
  - rec.arts.tv.soaps.cbs
  - rec.arts.tv.soaps.misc

- The Simpsons
  - alt.tv.simpsons
  - alt.tv.simpsons.itchy-scratchy

- Working
  - alt.tv.working

- South Park
  - alt.tv.southpark

- Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
  - alt.tv.star-trek.ds9

- Star Trek: Voyager
  - alt.tv.star-trek.voyager

- The Nanny
  - alt.tv.the-nanny

- The Practice
  - alt.tv.the-practice
  - alt.tv.thepractice

- The Pretender
  - alt.tv.pretender

- The X-Files
  - alt.tv.x-files
  - alt.tv.x-files.analysis
  - alt.tv.xfiles

- Xena
  - alt.tv.xena

A REASSESSMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC AFFAIRS MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of public affairs media on changes in diffuse and specific political orientations between the 1990 and 1992 general election campaigns, utilizing a two-wave panel of respondents. The results indicated that use of public affairs media was related to changes between 1990 and 1992 in the specific orientations of campaign interest, political discussion and attention to the 1992 campaign in the media. While public affairs media use was not related to changes in the diffuse orientations of perceived political efficacy and political trust in 1992, it did predict changes in 1992 partisan orientations. An additional analysis suggested that specific political orientations might influence diffuse ones over time, contrary to previous studies.

A REASSESSMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PUBLIC AFFAIRS MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL ORIENTATIONS

While the system of party machinery has grown, there has come into use the railway, the telegraph, the telephone and rural postal delivery. By means of the daily press the people of the State, of the entire nation, are brought together. There is thus made possible a sort of daily session or town meeting for the whole body politic. Party organs, which in their origin were eminently serviceable, are no longer needed to bring the people together.

Political Scientist Jess Macy of the Iowa College to the 4th annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in 1907

Political scientists David Easton and Jack Dennis have argued that a critical level of generalized confidence and trust among citizens is necessary for political systems to persist when faced with crises. As they put it, "Diffuse support forms a reservoir upon which a system typically draws in times of crisis, such as depressions, wars and internecine conflicts, when perceived benefits [of government] may recede to their lowest ebb"[1] According to early political socialization research, diffuse support begins to form early in childhood through positive attachments to symbols of democracy, such as the president, and then persists into adulthood.[2] Diffuse support, then, provides the foundation for the development of more specific political orientations regarding participation in the political process, attitudes on issues and feelings about those who govern.[3]

Early voting studies in the 1950s and 1960s suggested that diffuse support—partisan strength, political trust and perceived political efficacy—were stable throughout people's lifetimes, and thus they were less subject to short-term political forces than specific orientations.[4] As a result, diffuse political orientations are generally found to be unrelated to public affairs media use, which can be considered an index of exposure to short-term political forces.[5] Specific political orientations, on the other hand, such as campaign interest, discussion of public affairs and attention to politics in the media, have tended to be more strongly and positively correlated with public affairs media use.[6]

Recent evidence, however, has showed that diffuse political orientations are now fluctuating more widely in shorter cycles than in earlier studies, suggesting greater influence of short-term political forces on them.[7] Given the limited evidence based on longitudinal data that exists, the extent to which public affairs media use is producing this volatility should be examined.[8] Using a panel study of voting behavior conducted from 1990 to 1992 as part of the University of Michigan's National Election Studies (NES) series, this study will reassess the relationship between public affairs media use and diffuse versus specific media orientations.

Diffuse Political Orientations

Partisan Strength

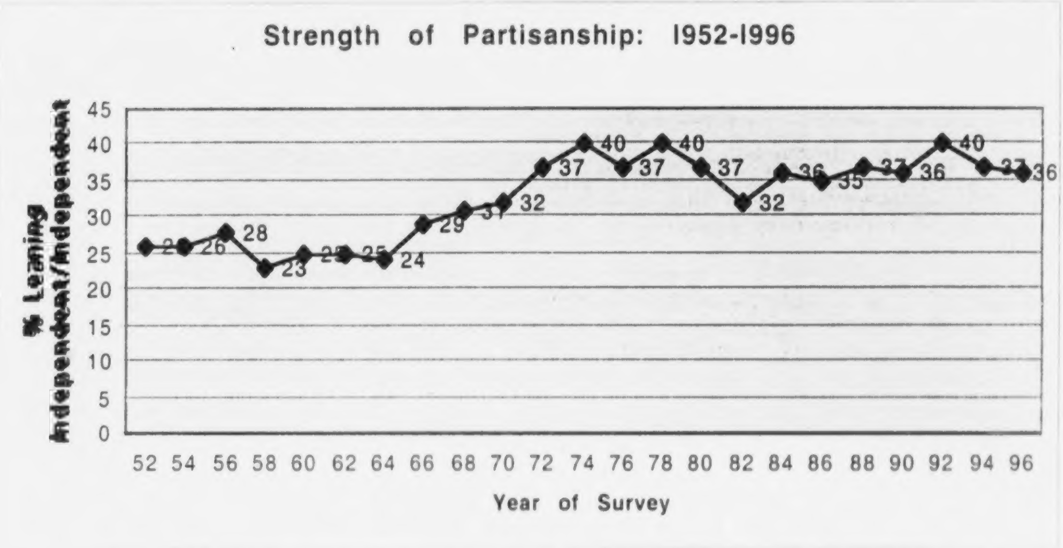
Political socialization research in the 1950s and 1960s indicated that a sense of partisanship, which is usually defined as an enduring psychological attachment to a political party, was more strongly transmitted between parent and child than other orientations.[9] Partisanship, moreover, was demonstrated to be relatively enduring, channeling and stabilizing vote choices from election to election. Based on their studies of the 1952 and 1956 presidential elections, the authors of *The American Voter* described the effect of partisanship in the electoral process this way:

> *A general observation about the political behavior of Americans is that their partisan preferences show great stability between elections... Its mark is readily seen in aggregate election statistics. For virtually any collection of states, counties, wards, precincts, or other political units one may care to examine, the correlation of the party division of the vote in successive elections is likely to be high. Often a change of candidates and a broad alteration in the nature of issues disturb very little the relative partisanship of a set of electoral units, which suggests that great numbers of voter have party attachments that persist through time.*[10]

Beginning in the 1960s, however, a growing percentage of voters began to dealign themselves from the Democratic and Republican parties.[11] Data from the NES survey series, conducted every two years, has shown declines in straight ticket voting, increased ticket splitting and a growing number of voters declaring independent status over the past 30 years.[12] These trends have been accompanied by a greater percentage of voters who perceive political parties as less relevant factors in their vote decision making.[13] Such voters, furthermore, perceive fewer differences between the two major parties, believe that one should vote for the person rather than the party and have nothing negative to say about either party.[14]

Yet shorter-term variations have also been apparent within this general trend toward partisan dealignment. The percentage of independent or leaning independent voters has varied considerably between the 1950s and now, from a low of 24 percent in 1964 to highs of 40 percent in 1974, 1976 and 1992, with short-term up and down cycles in between times, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1



Source: The National Election Studies, University of Michigan, based on these questions: "*Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, and Independent, or what?*" IF REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT: "*Would you call yourself a strong (REP/DEM) or not a very strong (REP/DEM)*? IF INDEPENDENT, OTHER OR NO PARTY PREFERENCE: "*Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?*"

A variety of factors may be responsible for these trends in partisan strength. As Wattenberg described, the general decline in partisanship may reflect the actual diminishing importance of parties in the presidential nomination process brought about by a primary/caucus system that allows candidates to take their cases directly to the voters though the media.[15] Wattenberg further argued that the way in which the media cover

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politics might also be a factor in partisan dealignment. A content analysis by him demonstrated that the ratio of mentions of candidates to political parties increased in presidential elections from 1952 through 1980 in two major newspapers and three national news magazines, while the number of linkages made in stories between parties and candidates decreased during the same period.[16]

Political Trust

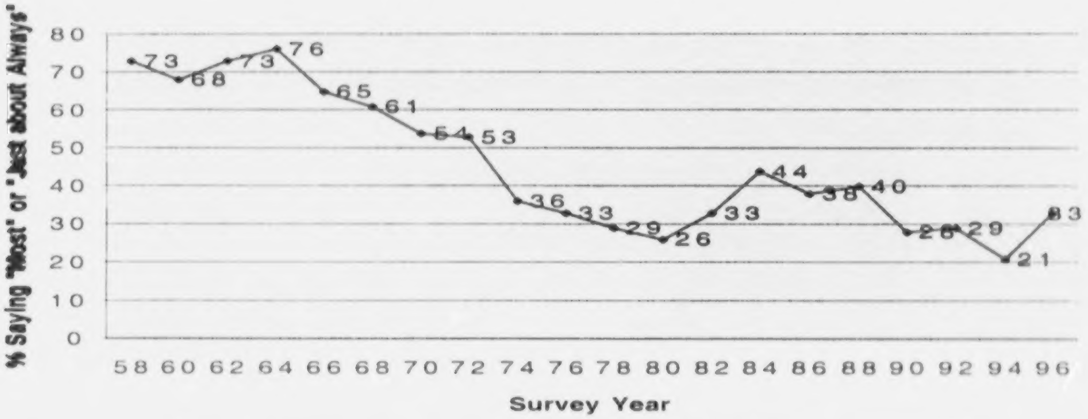
Political trust has variously been conceptualized as citizens' perceptions of how often the federal government does what is right and fair, prudently spends tax dollars, operates for the benefit of all, and the honesty of politicians.[17] Political socialization research in the 1950s and 1960s suggested that trust in the political system was acquired early in childhood and persisted as children politically matured into adulthood, as with other diffuse orientations.[18] Studies in the same era showed trust in the American system of government was quite high and stable.[19]

But according to data from the NES survey series, trust in the government has declined to about half the level it was at in the 1950s and 1960s, at least toward government in general, as shown in Figure 2. In 1966, the highest percentage of those saying that they almost always or most of the time trusted the government, 76, was registered in the survey series, while the lowest percentage saying so, 21, occurred in 1980. Yet short-term volatility in trust is also apparent within this general trend. The 1986 percentage of 44 percent who at least most of the time trusted their government stands out in contrast to 33 percent in 1984 and 21 percent in 1994.

A number of factors seem to produce this variability in political trust among the public. An analysis of the 1996 NES survey by Kazee and Roberts showed that political trust was unrelated to interest, participation and general public affairs media use during that election campaign.[20] Yet those with higher trust rated President Clinton's performance and likeability higher, while those with lower trust more frequently stated he made them angry. Trust was most strongly related, however, to higher levels of confidence and faith in the ability of the federal government to solve problems respondents rated as important.

Figure 2

Political Trust in Government: 1958-1996



Source: The National Election Studies, University of Michigan, based on this question: *"People have different ideas about the government in Washington. These ideas don't refer to democrats or republicans in particular, but just to government in general. We want to see how you feel about these ideas. How much time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time or only some of the time?"*

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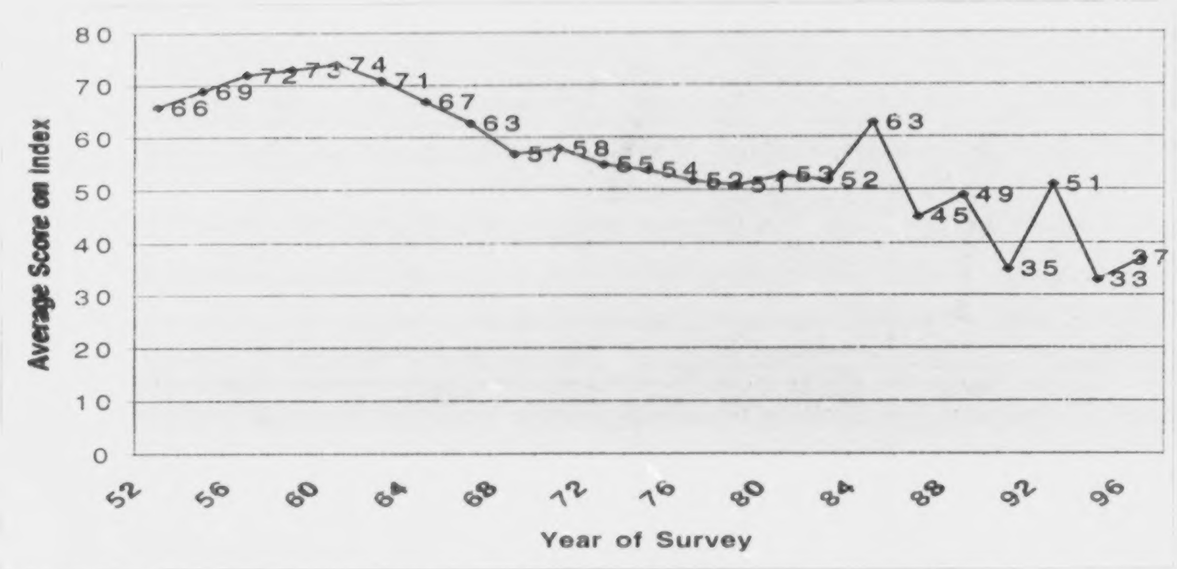
Perceived Political Efficacy

Political efficacy has most often been conceptualized as the extent to which citizens perceive they can they can influence government decisions.[21] Easton and Dennis' studies of children in the 1950s and 1960s demonstrated that they began to develop a sense of political efficacy as young as 8- or 9-years-old, even though they did not completely understand the political process.[22] Perceived political efficacy among adults was con-sistently associated with higher levels of participation in the political process in earlier voting studies. For example, voters Verba and Nie labeled "complete activists," because of their participation in many types of political activity, had higher levels of perceived efficacy and information seeking from the media about politics, compared to those who participated less.[23]

Today, however, perceived political efficacy varies considerably in the aggregate among adult citizens, according to NES survey data. As with strength of partisanship and political trust, perceived political efficacy has declined since the 1950s, as shown in Figure 3. Moreover, beginning in the mid-1980s, perceived political efficacy among the public began to peak during presidential election years and decline during off-year elections, showing a pattern similar to specific political orientations.

Figure 3

Political Efficacy: 1952-1996



Source: National Election Studies, University of Michigan, based on an index of responses to these items: "*People like me don't have any say about what the government does.*" and "*I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.*" The response scale for both items was: "*agree*," "*disagree*" or "*don't know.*"

Variable levels of cynicism about the political process, as influenced by contemporary events, is often put forth as a major factor that drives the perceived political efficacy of citizens.[24] The media's role in producing cynicism and thus lowered perceived efficacy is yet unclear. Logically, media's coverage of political events would seem at least indirectly to influence people's sense of political efficacy , especially when it indicates that their votes and other attempts to influence the political process appear to have made no difference.[25] Yet, most studies show that public affairs media use is negatively related to levels of cynicism and perceived political efficacy.[26] Pinkleton, Austin and Fortman's path analysis further suggested that negativism toward media content regarding politics is an exogenous variable that affects how cynical people become toward the political process, ultimately lowering their use of the public affairs media and other forms of political participation.[27]

Specific Political Orientations

In contrast to diffuse political orientations concerning attachment to the system, those more specific to the political process, government decision-making and those running the system tend to vary considerably within individuals over time. Specific orientations, such as political interest, participation, attention to campaigns, and discussion of political matters, all tend to vary according to the political season, government crises, level of concern about specific issues and other factors.[28] Moreover, specific political orientations tend to be related to one another, with path analyses suggesting that diffuse orientations causally precede political knowledge and public affairs media use, which in turn predict interest and participation in politics.[29] However, evidence about the causal relationships among political orientations is often based on data gathered when the electorate was more stable than today.

Interactive Effects

Eveland, among others, has pointed out that interactive effects of media, where the effect of media exposure on a criterion variable depends on the level of another independent or "moderator" variable, are not often tested for in mass communication research, despite theoretical bases for doing so.[30] As a result, because standard correlation and multiple regression statistical techniques assess linear relationships, the influence of media may be underestimated when interactive effects are present. In fact, theory and research suggests that public affairs media exposure may interact with a variety of moderating variables to produce changes in political orientations over time.

McLeod and Becker, for example, proposed a transactional model, which predicts that the effects of public media exposure on political orientations would depend on the particular gratification sought from such content.[31] Similarly, Smith demonstrated that adolescents' exposure to the 1976 presidential debates interacted with certain public affairs media use orientations to produce higher levels of issue certainty and more cohesive perceptions of the candidates' images, based on a two-wave panel data.[32] Smith and Ferguson further showed that interactions between uses of political television and partisan orientations were stronger predictors of interest, discussion and voting frequency than their individual main effects, even after controlling for public affairs media exposure and demographic variables.[33]

Aggregate versus Individual Change

Another important consideration is that much of the evidence concerning political orientation is based on cross-sectional survey data gathered at one time rather than panel data. Such aggregate analyses, as Jennings and Niemi have pointed out, allow inferences only about the magnitude and direction of net change of political orientations over time.[34]

Panel data, on the other hand, allow assessment of individual-level change over time, which can be obscured in aggregate analyses to the extent that individual-level changes occur in both directions. Change in both directions may well be the case for political orientations as people respond in their own unique way to the political environment.

Jennings and Niemi conducted one of the first long-term panel studies to assess the persistence of political orientations, gathering data among a national sample of adolescents and their parents in 1965 and again eight years later in 1973.[35] Attention to politics in the media and levels of knowledge, logically, proved to be quite persistent between 1965 and 1973 for both adolescents and their parents. But contrary to inferences based on aggregate data gathered in an earlier era, diffuse political orientations, such as political efficacy, strength of partisanship and political trust, varied considerably over time, although more so among the young people than their parents. The direction of individual changes in these orientations tended to be more direction than the other, suggesting period within maturation effects, according to Jennings and Niemi.[36]

Hypotheses

A growing body of evidence, then, suggests that the American electorate is steadily becoming less structured than indicated by political socialization and voting studies in the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, the distinction between diffuse orientations as established early in life and remaining relatively enduring and specific orientation as emerging later and more subject to influence by the immediate political environment no longer appears to be as valid. As Chaffee has pointed out, the findings reported in *The People's Choice* and those later in *The American Voter* and other voting studies were based on a highly structured electorate, which emerged during the depression and New Deal era.[37] As a result, public affairs media use had minimal influence on the more firmly established diffuse political orientations, attitudes and vote decisions.

More sophisticated study designs, changing patterns of political socialization, as well as the turbulent times since the 1960s, all offer some explanation for today's volatile electorate. The conclusions of earlier voting studies were primarily based on one-shot cross-sectional surveys, which, as pointed out earlier, did not allow the study of net individual change over time. Furthermore, more recent political socialization research suggests that young people in this era are acquiring more negative perceptions of politics, because of their dependency on media for public affairs information.[38] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the predictable nature of the American electorate has been disturbed by events since the 1950s, including the Vietnam War, the Women's and Civil Right's Movements, Watergate and even the recent impeachment of President Clinton.

Given less structured political orientations, citizens have, to use Weaver's term, a higher "need for orientation" in the political environment, resulting in greater dependency on the media for public affairs information.[39] Consequently, this study will reassess the relationships among diffuse and specific political orientations and public affairs media use. Utilizing a panel study design, these hypotheses were tested in this study:

Hypothesis 1: *Public affairs media use will be significantly related to changes in 1992 levels of specific political orientations, after controlling for their 1990 levels and demographic variables.*

Hypothesis 1 predicts that the analysis will replicate previous findings concerning the relationship between public media use and campaign interest, political discussion and attention to politics. Surprisingly few studies, however, have examined short-changes in them using longitudinal data.

Hypothesis 2: *Public affairs media use will be significantly related to 1992 levels of diffuse political orientations, after controlling for their 1990 levels and demographic variables.*

Hypothesis 2 predicts that a significant portion of the volatility in diffuse political orientations among today's electorate, as described above, will be accounted for by public affairs media use, which can be considered an indicator of the degree to which people attend to the immediate political environment.

Hypothesis 3: *The interaction between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of diffuse political orientations will be significantly related to changes in 1992 levels of specific political orientations.*

Hypothesis 3, therefore, predicts the influence of public affairs media on changes in the 1992 levels of specific political orientations will depend on the 1990 levels of diffuse ones. If so, this analysis will confirm the theoretical supposition in many political be-havior studies that diffuse orientations provide a foundation for specific types of orientations.

Hypothesis 4: *The interaction between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of specific political orientations will be significantly related to changes in 1992 levels of diffuse political orientations.*

Hypothesis 4 predicts that the relationship between public affairs media use and changes in 1992 levels of diffuse political orientations will depend on 1990 levels of diffuse ones. In contrast to Hypothesis 3, this hypothesis, then, predicts that specific political orientations may influence diffuse ones, suggesting a more reciprocal causal relationship among the two types of political orientations.

Methods

Sample

The hypotheses in this study were tested in a secondary analysis of a panel study of 1,980 citizens from 1990 to 1992 from the University of Michigan's American National Election Study series, which was obtained through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Respondents were originally interviewed following the 1990 general election and then subsequently reinterviewed one, two or three times in June or July 1991, and before and after 1992 general election. A total of 1060 respondents in the panel were measured in all four waves of the study, which coupled with missing data, reduced the sample size varying amounts for each variable when "listwise" deletion of data was used in the analysis.

Variables

Standard measures used in the NES surveys of diffuse or specific political orientations, public affairs media use and demographic variables were used in this study:

Strength of partisanship: Respondents were asked a series of questions in the 1990 and the preelection 1992 surveys to assess their partisan predispositions:

a. "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?"

b. IF REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT: "Would you call yourself a strong (REP/DEM) or a not very strong (REP/DEM)?"

c. IF INDEPENDENT, OTHER or NO PREFERENCE: "Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?"

In the NES data bank, these questions were combined into a summary variable with these categories: 0= strong democrat, 1= weak democrat, 3= independent, independent, 4= independent republican, 5= weak republican, 6= strong republican and 7= other party or refuses to say, and 8= apolitical. These categories were then recoded for this study into a strength of partisanship scale, with 4= strong republicans or democrats, 3= weak demo-crats or republicans, 2= independent republicans or democrats, and 1= independent, independents.

Political Trust: A simple summed index of trust was created from these items, asked of respondents in the 1990 and 1992 post-election surveys:

People have different ideas about the government in Washington. These ideas don't refer to Democrats or Republicans in particular, but just to the government in general. We want to see how you feel about these ideas. For example:

> a. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—Just about always, most of the time, only some of the time.
>
> b. Do you think that people in government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, some of it, or don't waste very much of it.
>
> c. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few high interests, looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
>
> d. Do you think that quite a few of the people running for government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?

The Cronbach's alphas for the political trust indices were .42 for 1990 and .32 for 1992.

Perceived Political Efficacy: A simple summed index of perceived political efficacy was created from these items asked of respondents in the 1990 and 1992 post-election surveys, using a five-point response scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree:

> a. Public officials like me don't care much what people like me think.
>
> b. People like me don't have nay say about what the government does.

c. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

The Cronbach's alphas for the perceived political efficacy indices were .66 for 1990 and .67 for 1992.

Campaign Interest: Political interest was measured by asking respondents in the 1990 and 1992 post-election surveys how interested they had been in each of the campaigns that had just been completed:

a. Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you were very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the campaigns this year?

Political Discussion: Respondents in the 1990 and 1992 post-election surveys were asked to estimate how often they discussed politics, using this question:

a. How often do you discuss politics with your family or friends—every day, 3 or 4 times week, once or twice a week, or less often than that?

Attention to the Campaign in the Media: A simple summed index was created from these two items asked of respondents in the 1990 and 1992 post-election surveys:

a. How much attention did you pay to newspaper articles about the campaigns—a great deal, quite a bit, some, very little, or none?

b. How much attention did you pay to news on TV about the campaign—a great deal, quite a bit, some, very little, or none?

The Cronbach's alphas for attention to campaign indices were .61 for 1990 and .65 for 1992.

Public Affairs Media Use:: A simple summed index of public affairs media use was created from these two items, asked of respondents in the 1992 survey conducted in the midst of the general election:

a. How many days in the past week did you read a newspaper?

b. How many days in the past week did you watch the news on TV?

The Cronbach's alpha for the public affairs index was .63.

Demographic Variables.: Also included in the analysis were several standard indicators of socioeconomic status: the respondents age, highest level of education attained and family income.

The Analysis Model

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses in this study. The general regression model used took this form:

$$Y1 = a + b1X1 + b2X2 + b3X3 + b4X4 + b5X5 + b6\,X1X5,$$

where $Y1$ = 1992 levels of political orientations, a= the intercept, $X1$= 1990 levels of political orientations, $X2$= age, $X3$= education, $X4$= income, $X5$= public affairs media use, and $X6$= the interaction term between $X1 \bullet X5$.

In this model, all variables were entered into the equation in one step as a group. As a result, controlling for 1990 levels of the political orientations leaves only unexplained variance due to changes in 1992 levels of political orientations. The resulting beta coefficients for the demographic variables, the media use index and the interaction term can then interpreted as indicating the amount of change that occurs in the political orientation in 1992 with a one-unit change in the independent variable. To avoid multicollinearity problems, the public affairs media use index and 1990 levels of the political orientations were "centered" before they were multiplied together to form the interaction term, in a procedure suggested by Cohen.[40]

Results

The results shown in Table 1 support Hypothesis 1 that public affairs media use will be significantly related to changes in 1992 levels of specific political orientations, after controlling for their 1990 levels and demographic variables. Public affairs media use most strongly predicted changes in 1992 levels of campaign interest and less strongly but significantly for political discussion and attention to the campaign in the media in 1992. A significant interaction between 1990 levels of campaign attention and public affairs media use predicted 1992 levels of attention to the campaign.

Table 1

Regression of 1992 Levels of Specific Political Orientations on their 1990 Levels, Demographic Variables, Public Affairs Media Use and an Interaction Term

Independent Variables	Campaign Interest '92	Campaign Discussion '92	Attention to Campaign in Media '92
Dependent Variable '90 (A)	.28[b]	.39[b]	.15[b]
Age	.02	.03	.08[a]
Education	.14[b]	06	.07[a]
Income	.16[b]	-.01	-.01
Public Affairs Media Use (B)	.22[a]	.10[a]	.12[b]
Interaction (AxB)	.00	-.05	.61[b]
R^2	.24[b]	.17[b]	.52[b]
N	952	640	402

[a] $p < .05$
[b] $p < .01$

Hypothesis 2 that public affairs media use will be significantly related to 1992 levels of diffuse political orientations, after controlling for their 1990 levels and demographic variables, received limited support from the results in Table 2 below. Public affairs media use only significantly predicted changes in 1992 levels of strength of partisanship. The significant and positive interaction term indicates that those with weaker partisan predispositions in 1990 were more likely to become stronger partisans when they were greater users of the public affairs media during the 1992 campaign.

Table 2

Regression of 1992 Levels of Diffuse Orientations on Their 1990 Levels, Demographic Variables, Public Affairs Media Use and an Interaction Term

Independent Variables	Partisanship '92[c]	Efficacy '92	Trust '92
Dependent Variable 1990 (A)	.42[b]	.38[b]	.55[b]
Age	.02	.02	.05
Education	-.02	.17[b]	.03
Income	-.03	.06	.03
Public Affairs Media Use (B)	-.10[b]	.04	-.04
Interaction (AxB)	.16[b]	-.01	-.01
R^2	.19[b]	.23[b]	.29[b]
N	1202	920	822

[a] = $p < .05$
[b] = $p < .01$
[c] = Strength of partisanship is coded so that higher levels indicate stronger partisanship.

Table 3 below offers no support for Hypothesis 3 that the interaction between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of diffuse political orientations will be significantly related to changes in 1992 levels of specific political orientations. None of the interactions between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of the diffuse political orientations significantly predicted 1992 levels of campaign interest, political discussion and attention to the campaign. In fact, none of the diffuse political orientations in 1990 significantly predicted changes in any of the 1992 specific orientations. Only the main effect of public affairs media use significantly predicted changes between 1990 and 1992 in campaign interest, political discussion and attention to the campaign in the media between 1990 and 1992.

The results in Table 4 below provide only limited support for Hypothesis 4 that the interaction between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of specific political orientations will be significantly related to changes in 1992 levels of diffuse political orientations. Although not large, the interaction terms between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of campaign interest, political discussion and attention to the campaign in the media were significantly related to changes in 1992 levels of partisanship. A small but significant interaction between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of attention to the campaign also predicted changes in political trust in 1992. The strongest predictors of political efficacy in 1992 were the 1990 levels of the three specific political orientations.

T

Regression of 1992 Levels of Specific Political Orientation
Affairs Media Use

Independent Variables	Interest '92[e]	Interest '92	Interest '92	Dis '92
Dependent Variable '90	.28[b]	.32[b]	.30[b]	.
Partisanship '90 (A)[c]	.02	---	---	.
Efficacy '90 (B)	---	.01	---	-
Trust '90 (C)	---	---	.07	-
P.A. Media Use (D)	.22[b]	.22[b]	.22[b]	.
Interaction (AxD)	-.02	---	---	.
Interaction (BxD)	---	-.01	---	-
Interaction (CxD)	---	---	-.01	-
R^2	.23[b]	.24[b]	.24[b]	.
N	944	943	943	

[a] $p < .05$ [b] $p < .01$

[c] Strength of partisanship is coded so that higher scores indicate st

[d] All results additionally control for age, education and income.

[e] To avoid multicollinearity problems, 1992 levels of each specific orientation and the interaction between it and public affairs media

Table 3

Orientations on Their 1990 Levels, 1990 Diffuse Political Orientations, Public
Media Use and Interaction Terms^{d}

st	Discussion '92^{e}	Discussion '92	Discussion '92	Attention '92^{e}	Attention '92	Attention '92
	.37^{b}	.37^{b}	.38^{b}	.32b	.33^{b}	.33b
	.03	---	---	.03	---	---
	---	.07	---	---	.02	---
	---	---	.00	---	---	.05
	.10^{b}	.11^{b}	.10a	.15^{b}	.15b	.16^{b}
	.03	---	---	.07	---	---
	---	-.03	---	---	.05	---
	---	---	.01	---	---	-.04
	.17^{b}	.18^{b}	.18b	.20^{b}	.20b	.19^{b}
3	639	638	607	402	401	376

indicate stronger partisanship.
income.
ach specific orientation was separately regressed on 1990 levels of each diffuse
fairs media use.

T

Regression of 1992 Levels of Diffuse Political Orientations on
Use, and In

Independent Variables	Partisanship[c] '92[c]	Partisanship '92	Partisansh '92
Dependent Variable '90	.41b	.46b	.56b
Interest '90 (A)	.04	---	---
Discussion '90 (B)	---	.08b	---
Attention '90 (C)	---	---	.03
P.A. Media Use (D)	-.10b	-.07a	.04
Interaction (AxD)	.07a	---	---
Interaction (BxD)	---	.09b	---
Interaction (C xD)	---	---	.15b
R^2	.19b	.23b	.33b
N	1201	853	401

[a] p < .05

[b] p < .01

[c] Strength of partisanship is coded so that higher levels indicate s

[d] All results additionally control for age, education and income.

e To avoid multicollinearity problems, 1992 levels of each diffus
orientation and the interaction between it and public affairs medi

Table 4

tations on Their 1990 Levels, 1990 Specific Orientations, Public Affairs Media
Jse, and Interaction Terms[d]

Partisanship ‘92	Efficacy ‘92[c]	Efficacy ‘92	Efficacy ‘92	Trust ‘92[c]	Trust ‘92	Trust ‘92
.56b	.34b	.40b	.39b	.53b	.52b	.50a
---	.18b			.01	---	---
---	---	.10b	---	---	.07	
.03	---	---	.14b	---	---	-.02
.04	.01	-.01	-.08	-.04	-.03	-.06
---	.02	---	---	-.01	---	---
---	---	-.06	---	---	-.02	---
.15b	---	---	-.02	---	---	.09a
.33b	.26b	.24b	.27b	.29b	.28b	.30b
401	920	685	371	822	622	330

indicate stronger partisanship.
income.
each diffuse orientation was separately regressed on 1990 levels of each specific
fairs media use.

Discussion

Several results from this study are worth highlighting:

First, public affairs media use during the 1992 general election resulted in significantly higher levels of interest in the 1992 campaign, political discussion about it with friends and family and attention to the campaign in the media. In contrast, public affairs media use significantly predicted only 1992 levels of strength of partisanship among the diffuse political orientations. To the extent that public affairs media use is an index of attention to the current political environment, perhaps strength of partisanship is more of a specific than a diffuse political orientation.

Second, public affairs media use significantly interacted with their 1990 levels to produce in 1992 greater attention to the campaign and strength of partisanship in 1992, beyond their individual main effects. Predicted values were calculated (not shown) at low, medium and high values of 1990 campaign attention and 1990 strength of partisanship.[41] Logically, the results indicated that that those who were least attentive to the 1990 campaign and least partisan but were higher public affairs media users tended to have the most change in these orientations between 1990 and 1992.

Third, the results of this study suggest further investigation of the theoretical proposition that diffuse political orientations, because they are established earlier in life and tend to be relatively enduring, provide a foundation for specific ones. None of the diffuse orientations in 1990 were significantly related to changes in the 1992 levels of campaign interest, political discussion or attention to the campaign in the media. In contrast, the interaction terms between public affairs media use and 1990 levels of all three specific orientations were significantly related to changes in strength of partisanship in 1992. The 1990 levels of campaign interest, political discussion and attention to the campaign, furthermore, also significantly predicted changes in political efficacy. However, more extensive time-series data are needed to examine the causal relationships among these variables.

Limitations

A number of limitations should be kept in mind as the results of this study are considered:

- Because this study made use of an existing data set, only short-term changes over a two-year period in political orientations could be examined. As noted above, more extensive time-series data are needed to examine the differing time lags that are likely to exist in the complex causal relationships among this set of variables. Furthermore, longer time series would allow the influences of specific political events to be taken into account.

- The size of the standardized regression coefficients of the 1990 variables and associated interaction terms that significantly predict changes in the 1992 levels of the orientations were, practically speaking, quite small—tending to be the .10 to .20 range for the most part. Yet, given that these results are based on a national probability sample, even a small amount of change in a political orientation extrapolates to a sizeable number of people in the electorate. A coefficient of .10, for example, means that a one-unit change in that variable, say public affairs media use, translates into a 10 percent increase or decrease, depending upon its direction, among the public in a political orientation.

- The regression models in this study, which included controls for demographic variables, accounted for total amounts of variance in changes in the 1992 levels of the political orientations that ranged from 17 to 52 percent. While these amounts of variance explained are significant both statistically and practically speaking, they also indicated that other variables are at work to create changes in citizen's orientations to the world of politics. These might include issue saliences, use of alternative information sources such as the Internet and the impact of current political events. Future research should investigate the influence of these and other variables.

Conclusion

Overall, these results are consistent with the steadily emerging evidence in the past 20 years that the American electorate is growing more volatile. As a result, many of the basic assumptions about the role of media in the political process, based on the classic voting studies conducted in a different time, are open to question. As the American electorate has grown more volatile, the power of the media to directly influence political thinking and behavior has concomitantly grown. We may now be in the "powerful effects" era of media in the political process that Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet expected but did not find more than 50 years ago in their benchmark study of voters in Erie County, Ohio.[42]

ENDNOTES

[1] David Easton and Jack Dennis, " A Political Theory of Political Socialization," *in Socialization to Politics*, ed. Jack Dennis (John Wiley and Sons, 1973): 46.

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[7] See time-series data gathered on political orientations in the University of Michigan's National Election Study series from 1948 to the present, which is available at http://www.umich.edu/~nes/sitemap.htm/

[8] See Margaret K. Latimer, "The Floating Voter and the Media," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (Winter, 1987): 805-13; Steven H. Chaffee and Sun Y. Choe, "Time of Final Decision and Media Use During the Ford-Carter Campaign," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 44 (1980): 52-69;

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[13] Wattenberg, "The Decline of;" Martin P. Watttenberg, *The Rise of Candidate Centered-Centered Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

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[16] Wattenberg, "The Decline of."

[17] See, for example, Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, "The American Voter." Political trust has been measured in a variety of ways, with some studies focusing on a single aspect of trust and others taking a multi-dimensional approach using an index, resulting in conceptual confusion. Citrin, for example, has argued that that the most commonly used trust in government indices do not discriminate between the truly politically alienated and those who do not like or trust certain political leaders. As a result, the question can be raised whether it is trust in government that is actually declining, that of politicians or both. For contrasting view points, see Arthur H. Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964-1970,"

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[26] Among a great number of other studies, see Jack M. McLeod and Daniel G. McDonald, "Beyond Simple Exposure: Media Orientations and Their Impact on Political Processes," *Communication Research* 12 (January, 1985): 3-35.

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[37] Steven H. Chaffee, personal communication with the author, March 8, 1999. See Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard R. Berelson and Hazel Gaudet, *The People's Choice* (New York: Columbia University press, 1948); Bernard Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William McPhee, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation* in *a Presidential Campaign* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954

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JOURNALISTS AND THEIR COMPUTERS:

AN INSEPARABLE LINK FOR THE FUTURE?

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JOURNALISTS AND THEIR COMPUTERS: AN INSEPARABLE LINK FOR THE FUTURE?

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the role of computers in newsgathering. Drawing on daily newspaper data collected in annual national censuses between 1994 and 1998, the study reviews use of computers in newsrooms, needs for new computer skills, the most-sought computer tools, leading subjects for news stories and projects that were reported using computers, and journalists' perceptions of advantages and disadvantages that accompany computer use in newsgathering. The study found computer use in newsgathering has steadily grown during 1994-98 and that newsrooms seem to be making a serious commitment to use of computers and computer training in gathering news.

JOURNALISTS AND THEIR COMPUTERS: AN INSEPARABLE LINK FOR THE FUTURE?

Computers have been a part of mass communication in the United States almost since the first commercial computers were developed at the end of World War II (DeFleur, 1997; Pavlik, 1996). Rare uses of the then-expensive-to-operate mainframe computers included polling and survey research for national elections in the early 1950s, at large dailies and television networks with the resources for such original, time-consuming, and expertise-laden projects (DeFleur, 1997; Meyer, 1979; Reavy, 1996). Arguably, computers have had a significant impact on American society in the past half-century, comparable to the telephone, radio, and television. Networked computers are the core of government and many businesses and industries. Recent national focus on the so-called "Y2K" or year 2000 programming problem indicates the widespread dependency on computers at almost all levels of society in 1999. Computer systems are the foundation for a wide range of mass communication as well, including gathering and distributing information (Pavlik, 1996). Computers have changed how citizens are informed about current events and what they know about their governments and themselves (Koch, 1996; Selnow, 1998).

Although there have been great technical advances in recent years, little is known about computer use for gathering information. This paper evaluates the changing roles of, and growing dependence on, computers as newsgathering tools in newspaper newsrooms during the past five years. The paper will look at computer use patterns, computer newsgathering skills sought, computer tools sought for newsgathering, story and project

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subjects that employed computers in gathering or analyzing information, and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of use of computers as reporting resources.

Originally, computers were utilized by mass communication industries for business purposes such as payroll, advertiser billings, inventory, and general accounting. At magazines and newspapers, early applications included circulation and subscriber lists (Garrison, 1983). While business uses were common early in the evolution of the computer, newsroom applications were not. In the 1960s, mainframe computer usage in newsrooms was expanded to include isolated analyses of public databases. A few database-oriented projects produced from government data copied onto nine-track tape appeared during this era, but these were extremely unusual (Garrison, 1995). Some of the first regular applications of computers in newsrooms occurred in the 1970s when the copyediting and typesetting stages of production process became computerized. But these uses had no connection to newsgathering (Garrison, 1979).

The greater impact of computers on newsgathering did not take place until a decade later. In the early and mid 1980s, smaller and less expensive personal computers became available at the same time that online resources began to expand. Furthermore, computer-based information retrieval was determined to cost less than obtaining the information in person (Callahan, 1999; Resnick, 1993). Thus, a gradual revolution in newsgathering began in the 1980s. As these desktop computers simultaneously grew more powerful and less expensive and software became increasingly user-friendly, applications in newsgathering expanded.

By the early 1990s, the stage was set for the beginning of radical change in newsgathering. Traditional in-person and library archive research began to give way to

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computer-based reporting. Newsrooms are in the midst of this revolution in 1999. Regardless of what computer newsgathering has been called— from "computer-assisted reporting" to "database journalism" and other similar names— the process of irreversible change is underway (Garrison, 1998; Houston, 1999; Koch, 1996). Reporters and their editors are increasingly dependent on commercial online resources and other networked computers for information gathering (Reddick & King, 1997; Simon & Napolitano, 1999). Use of the Internet as a newsgathering tool is becoming universal (Ross & Middleberg, 1999).

This is not the first information revolution, of course. The origins of the information revolution actually surfaced several centuries ago (Koch, 1996). However, computers have been the catalyst for the latest series of radical changes in how information is gathered and processed for mass communication. Some of the effects discussed in the literature seem clear: Reporters save time, but gather more information. In doing so, reporters also save their companies money while they are more productive, more effective on deadline, and able to add context and depth to ordinary stories (Garrison, 1996; Resnick, 1993; Ruberry, 1996; Simon & Napolitano, 1999). It is one of the few areas in newsrooms in this decade where new employment opportunities have been created (Ciotta, 1996).

Interest in computer-based journalism has grown rapidly, as has recognition of its effectiveness through numerous high-level awards since 1990 (Houston, 1999; Reavy, 1996). One of the reasons for these computer-driven benchmark changes, simply stated, is that American society has changed. Business has been equally, perhaps even more, influenced by personal computing. Education, government, and almost all other segments

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of modern America have been affected by computing. Governments, for example, have kept records on computers for almost a half-century, but the extent of the electronic record keeping has geometrically increased in the past decade, giving journalists incentive to use computers to collect and analyze information as stories are prepared (Garrison, 1998; Houston, 1999; Simon & Napolitano, 1999).

Award-winning investigative reporter Elliot Jaspin believes that the rapid growth and increasing sophistication of computing tools will begin to include more and more journalists who, because they lack levels of computer literacy and are often shut out of such projects. "[I]t will be far easier to use computers and what computers will be able to do will be far more extensive [in the remaining part of this decade]," Jaspin wrote (1994, pp. 14-15). "Now that will mean reporters who have been locked out because they didn't understand DOS, or they had trouble remembering all the funny little commands, will be able to simply type on a screen, tell me how many friends of the mayor have gotten contracts, in a natural language type of way."

Computers connected through networks have extended the abilities of journalists to gather and distribute information in this decade. As a result, the Internet's World Wide Web seems to have a bright future as the centerpiece of global computer communication and for much research as the new century nears (Callahan, 1999; Lehto & Polonsky, 1996). As an industry in the business of gathering and processing information, newspapers appear poised to give the Web a critical role in newsrooms for both newsgathering and for news distribution.

Adoption of new ideas, objects, and practices takes time in any social system, even a small and highly focused professional system such as journalism. Diffusion of

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technological innovation has been a widely studied process (Lin, 1998; Lin & Jeffres, 1998; Reagan, Pinkleton, Chen, & Aaronson, 1995). Rogers (1995), in his classic study of diffusion, identifies five stages in the process of adoption of new technologies. They are exposure to the innovation, formation of attitudes toward the new idea, a decision to adapt or reject the innovation, implementation, and confirmation or reinforcement. Newspaper journalists have found themselves moving through these stages of this process during the past five to ten years. However, it is unclear in the literature that has emerged where journalists are in this process. This study will attempt to add new light to that issue.

Usage Patterns

Numerous scholars have argued the importance of high technology in studying mass communication and society and journalism during the past three decades (for example, see Bagdikian, 1971; Dizard, 1985; Koch, 1991; McLuhan, 1964; Pool, 1983; Smith, 1980). Journalists are beginning to understand how valuable the computer has become in their daily lives.

There are two main approaches in the small body of literature focusing on computer-based newsgathering. Studies include both online- and network-based newsgathering that use specialized commercial services and Internet-based services, such as the World Wide Web (Callahan, 1999; Reddick & King, 1997). Another body of research has also focused on database-oriented analysis using existing and originally created databases from both the public and private sectors. Reporters have increasingly adopted computers in their news reporting (Garrison, 1998; Houston, 1999). Rose Ciotta,

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a database-reporting specialist at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, wrote that journalists "are tapping into data and producing high-impact stories on topics ranging from criminals among nursing home workers and school teachers to unsafe elevators and the influence of political contributions" (Ciotta, 1996, p. 36). Ciotta observed that a number of experts have acknowledged the revolution in investigative and other news reporting techniques occurring in this decade. Brant Houston (1994), executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors and former director of the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting, is an advocate of the importance of computers in newsgathering. "I really believe this is journalism's future. I think that if we don't pay attention to how to get to information electronically, how to access it, how to analyze it, and how to disseminate it, we're going to be in a situation of going on the information superhighway in a horse and buggy."

Computer Skills

Researchers and practitioners have given increasing attention given to computer literacy in newsrooms. Studies indicate the demand for training and educational programs for journalists already on the job as well as for student journalists (Garrison, 1998; Garrison, 1996). Loyd and Gressard (1986) have stated that individuals must feel at ease with the computer, feel confident with it, and even like it to become computer literate.

Numerous individuals have proposed newsroom computer literacy programs with varying emphases on different hardware and software. Generally, studies or discussions about necessary computer skills in newsrooms have pointed to the need for competency in at least one operating system, word processing, spreadsheets or another database

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program, and at least one World Wide Web browser (Dedman, 1997; Johnson, 1993; Johnson, 1994; O'Reilly, 1997; Wolfe, 1993; Woods, 1993).

Computer Tools

In addition to skills and training, journalists need the appropriate hardware and software to do their work. Garrison (1998) found that hardware and software upgrades, replacements, or original purchases dominate their "wish lists" for resources. Specific software, such as programs to work with databases, was an important upgrade in 1997. Faster access to online services, such as the Internet, was also valued. Training has also become part of new requests.

Story and Project Subjects

If the package of skills and resources is properly combined, stories and projects using computers are published. Garrison (1997) found that crime statistics and education were the most-often named subjects, but the judicial system, public spending, traffic tickets, elections, and campaign contributions were also common subjects involving computer-based reporting. He also found that topics for news stories that used online research included the evolving World Wide Web, company or business profiles, crime and the courts, education, and financial / securities. Backgrounding, finding experts, searching for people and sources, checking other newspapers' news stories, and accessing online databases were among the most-cited uses of online tools.

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Advantages and Disadvantages

The scholarly literature focusing on reasons to use or not use computers in newsgathering is thin. Journalists cited by Davenport, Fico and Weinstock (1996), Garrison (1998), Houston (1999), and Miller (1998) often point to the completeness, efficiency, thoroughness, the competitive edge, speed, sophistication, depth, and extended reach as incentives to incorporate computers into newsgathering.

There are still individuals and news organizations that have not integrated computers into their daily reporting. Reasons commonly cited, according to Davenport, Fico, and Weinstock (1996) and Garrison (1998), include cost, lack of expertise, time, and lack of computer resources.

METHOD

To understand how far journalists have evolved in their use of computers for information gathering in this decade, it is necessary to analyze:

1. *What are the levels of use of computers in newspaper newsrooms?*
2. *What are needs for new computer and newsgathering skills?*
3. *What are the most-sought computer tools in newsrooms?*
4. *What are the leading subjects for news stories and special projects that use computers?*
5. *What are journalists' perceptions of the main advantages and disadvantages in using computers in newsgathering?*

During the past five years, national censuses were annually conducted of daily newspapers with circulations of 20,000 or greater. As newspaper circulations changed

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and as some newspapers ceased to exist or were merged into other newspapers during the periods under study, the membership of the population changed slightly from year to year. Population sizes were 514 newspapers in 1994, 514 in 1995, 510 in 1996, 510 in 1997, and 504 in 1998. Circulation figures used were those listed in the current *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* during 1994-98 (for example, see Anderson, 1998). In each census except 1994, two follow-up mailings were used to enhance response rates. In 1994, only one follow-up mailing was conducted. Response rates were n = 185, or 37.1 percent (1998); n = 226, 44.3 percent (1997); n = 233, 45.7 percent (1996); n = 287, 56.5 percent (1995); and n = 208, 40.5 percent (1994).

To various measures of "use," respondents were asked closed-ended questions focusing on whether their newspaper uses computers in newsgathering, whether the newspaper uses online resources for reporting, the number of people involved in computer-based reporting, and whether the newspaper has its own World Wide Web site. Existence of a Web site is an additional indicator of the technical sophistication of computerization in a newsroom. To further measure online use, respondents were asked to indicate the leading commercial and non-commercial online resources used for news reporting. Frequency of use of online resources was measured with a list containing the options of daily, weekly, monthly, or less frequent use of online resources in newsgathering.

Questions about computer skills and the preferred next computer resources to acquire were asked in a closed-ended format after use of an open-ended question during the initial year the items were included in the study. The open-ended findings are not reported.

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Respondents reported the subjects of news stories and projects recently completed that employed computer information gathering through an open-ended question. These open-ended responses were then analyzed and categorized for analysis. Similarly, respondents were asked open-ended questions about the leading advantages and disadvantages in using computers in reporting. These responses were analyzed and categorized as reported in the findings below.

Demographics— circulation, region served, and individual respondent newsroom roles— of respondents and their newspapers have been consistent over the five years. Response patterns represent all regions of the country and have produced a median circulation each year of approximately 53,000 copies. In each year, respondents have been editors, computer-assisted reporting supervisors, news researchers, investigative reporters, or special project reporters. Because the study involved analysis of a population, not a sample, statistical tests are not reported. The results presented are part of a larger study that used a six or eight-page questionnaire, depending on the year.

FINDINGS

1. What are the levels of use of computers in newspaper newsrooms?

Table 1 data show that general computer use for newsgathering has grown in the past five years. In 1998, the most recent year compiled, 90 percent reported using computers to find and analyze information. The figure was only 66 percent in 1994. Use of online tools has also spread during the past five years. In 1998, online resources were used in reporting at 97 percent of responding newspapers. The figure was only 57 percent

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in 1994. The discrepancy may lie in the fact that some respondents perceive online use as different from computer use, which, to them, meant use and analysis of offline databases.

The number of people devoted to using computers for newsgathering has also grown. In 1998, mean was 7.5. Ranged from 0 (n = 32) to 100 reported by one newspaper. Many newsrooms reported two to ten persons. In 1997, the mean was 7.9 persons; in 1996, it was 6.3; in 1995, it was 4.7; and in 1994, it was 3.5. The number of newspapers with World Wide Web sites has grown from 67 percent in 1997 to 83 percent in 1998.

As use of online resources has grown during the five-year period, use of the Internet, including the World Wide Web, has also increased. The Web is clearly the dominant online resource. Data in Table 2 show more than 92 percent of respondents use it in newsgathering and that it has grown steadily since 1994 when it was used by only one in four newsrooms. Growth was most rapid between 1995 and 1997, and the spread of use of the tool seems to have leveled at almost complete adoption. Local government information, commonly available in digital form in the United States, was used by 54 percent of respondents in 1998. One factor in use of such a resource is its availability. Not every local government has made its records available on the Web, through bulletin board services or other electronic forms, but the proportion is increasing annually and use will likely continue to grow.

Commercial services that acquire public and private databases and package them for sale to customers are also widely used by American journalists, Table 2 data show. Lexis/Nexis, a vast collection of libraries of public records and publication archives databases, is the leading commercial resource at 36 percent. Its use had been steady for

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four years, but has jumped noticeably in the past year. America Online, once the leading commercial online resource, declined from its peak in 1996 at more than 47 percent to 35 percent. This may be due to availability of other access to the Internet and World Wide Web in newsrooms where AOL had been used primarily as an Internet service provider.

Table 3 indicates that frequency of use has also increased steadily over the five-year period. Daily use of online tools has grown from about one-quarter of newsrooms to nearly two-thirds in 1998. Similarly, the number of newsrooms that has never used online tools had almost disappeared by 1998.

2. What are the demands for new computer and newsgathering skills?

With more individuals in the newsroom using computers for information gathering, the need for computer skills does not seem to go away. Training is in high demand, Table 4 data suggest. Respondents report that the most-needed computer skills are general online abilities (71 percent), use of the World Wide Web (61 percent), and spreadsheet skills (60 percent).

Other important computer skills named were basic word processing and knowledge of database tools— relational database and spreadsheet programs such as Microsoft Access and Microsoft Excel that permit users to create and manipulate databases. Basic operating systems (Windows 95/98/NT and Macintosh) skills were also a high priority. However, analytical mapping programs— products that permit graphical presentation of databases on different types of maps— and graphics software were not widely named and they remain, it seems, the province of newsroom specialists.

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3. What are the most-sought computer tools in newsrooms?

As skills grow and as use increases, the demand for new tools can become intense. Data in Table 5 show four years of interest in new computer tools used for newsgathering and news analysis. Database software is the first item on many wish lists in 1998, at 31 percent. It ranked in the top three in each of the other three years. The need for database software has taken the top spot from general hardware requests (e.g., upgraded or new PCs-workstations), yet the need for new or upgraded hardware remains important. In 1995-97, it was the leading need. In 1998, it ranked second at 19 percent.

Demand for mapping software and Internet-World Wide Web resources is growing also. Mapping software ranked third at 14 percent in 1998. Respondents listed improved access or new access to the Internet as a high priority in 1998. Ranked fourth at 9 percent, this need was not as high as other needs in the previous three years. Interest in computer skills training is also significant in 1998 at 6 percent, but it is down from its highest proportion, 10 percent, the previous year.

4. What types of subjects for news stories that use computers are most common?

The types of news stories and special projects created using computers, like other types of news reporting, are subject to news cycles. The leading subjects over the past four years are schools and education, elections, the local economy and public spending, and real estate and property records, data in Table 6 show.

News stories and projects about education and politics dominate computer-based journalism. Schools and education stories were most often named in 1998, by 15 percent. Generally, these stories included analyses of how students perform in various local school systems, how teachers perform their jobs, administrative effectiveness, school safety, and school spending. Election coverage, as might be expected, was the leading subject in 1997, the year that 1996 election year reporting was submitted in responses to the study. Elections coverage is not limited to returns. The most popular elections stories included results and support analysis, as well as campaign contributors and other forms of support for candidates.

Stories about local economic conditions and local public spending also ranked high during the four-year analysis. A growing fourth area of reporting, real estate and property ownership patterns, property tax analyses, and other trends, has become popular.

5. What do journalists see as the main advantages and disadvantages in using computers in newsgathering?

For the past three years, study respondents most often cited increased speed in finding information as the primary advantage in using computers, Table 7 data show. In 1998, the proportion was 21 percent after reaching 25 percent a year earlier. The ability to extend research and reporting was also highly rated. This advantage ranked second in 1998 (19 percent) while it was top rated at 26 percent a year earlier. Analysis and interpretation of public and private information and the completeness and depth that come from data were also commonly listed, ranking third (18 percent) in 1998 and in the top four each of the three years measured.

While journalists often believe using computers can save time, they also believe it can be time consuming. A total of 26 percent rated this as the leading disadvantage of computer-based journalism. This advantage was also top rated in 1997 and 1996. A time-

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consuming problem, database difficulties such as finding data or cleaning "dirty" public databases prior to analysis, was listed second in 1998 (14 percent). There never seems to be enough training and expertise to meet the needs for stories. Journalists also often complained in 1998 (11 percent).

Data in Table 8 also point to other concerns. One recurring theme centers on the belief that computers are not the solution to everything when reporting a story. Numerous respondents said they knew of naïve colleagues who felt the computer was a reporting godsend and problem-solver (10 percent in 1998). While this proportion declined in the most recent year, it was viewed as a serious problem by even larger proportions of respondents in 1997 and 1996. In a related criticism of computer-based journalism, respondents expressed the sentiment that such reporting is less people focused. Respondents also stated that confirmation of online information is difficult and learning techniques are difficult and discouraging in the beginning.

CONCLUSIONS

Journalists and their computers are forging an inseparable link for the future. There is compelling evidence offered in this study, from five years of national research, that journalists' dependence on computers for reporting and other forms of information gathering is steadily growing. Use of computers, especially in networked form, is expanding toward 100 percent use. Growth in use should not subside in the years ahead if current technologies and trends remain steady. In fact, the data in this study suggest that computers are in newsrooms for the long haul.

It seems inevitable that new technologies will come along to replace computers and networks or, at the least, improve the ways in which they are used. But, as Koch (1996) argues, new technologies build on old ones. Transportation is one obvious example of this evolution during the past two centuries.

Rogers' (1995) five stages of new technology adoption provide a paradigm for what is happening with computer use for newsgathering in newspaper newsrooms. It appears, from the data about computer use in this study, that journalists are clearly beyond the stages of exposure to this innovation, formation of attitudes toward it, making a decision to adopt or reject the innovation, and implementation of the innovation of computer-based newsgathering. Those stages, it appears from the data, occurred from 1994 to 1996. In 1997 and 1998, implementation was well underway. It also appears, from the analysis of the comments about the advantages and disadvantages of using computers in newsgathering, that the final stage of confirmation or reinforcement was taking place in early 1998.

The levels for general use of computers in newsgathering, frequency of daily use in newsgathering, and general use of the networked computer through the World Wide Web are close to complete adoption. There are a few news organizations responding to the study that have not begun to use computers in newsgathering. For them, it is likely a budget issue and, eventually, they will also adopt the new tools. For many of the responding newspapers in this study, use of computers has become routine and led a handful of respondents to wonder why bother to measure use when computer-based reporting is as common as using the telephone in their newsrooms.

Demand for general online skills and, particularly, abilities to get the most from the World Wide Web, also point to the growing dependence on the networked computer. Journalists will continue to focus their computer-based reporting on public issues and subjects since these are a ready set of data and online resources. The emphasis on education, elections, and local budgets and economic matters underlines the dependence journalists continue to have on public sources of information.

Computers have caused an interesting division among users over the issue of time. A large group feels the devices save time, but others feel they take even more time. Other cited advantages and disadvantages in the adoption of computers as reporting tools show two "haves" and "have-nots" communities in newsrooms centering on available resources, computer training, and overall computer literacy. This may be a matter of computer skills and resources, but there may be other factors involved that are not uncovered by this study. Additional inquiry is needed to better understand this finding.

TABLES

TABLE 1
GENERAL USE OF COMPUTERS

Category	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Uses computers in newsgathering	66.3%	69.7%	78.1%	88.1%	89.7%
Uses online in newsgathering	57.2	63.8	80.7	89.8	96.7
Newspaper has own Web site	——	——	——	67.3	82.6

TABLE 2
LEADING ONLINE RESOURCES IN NEWSROOMS

Service	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Internet / WWW	25.0%	44.6%	66.5%	91.6%	92.4%
Local govt. online	38.9	27.2	28.3	46.0	54.1
Lexis / Nexis	28.8	28.2	28.8	25.7	36.2
America Online	17.3	38.0	47.2	42.5	35.1
PACER	——	19.5	23.2	27.4	28.1
Autotrack	——	——	——	20.4	27.0
FedWorld	——	19.9	20.6	19.9	21.1
Usenet Newsgroups	——	——	——	——	21.1
Any type of BBS	35.6	31.4	35.6	23.9	20.5
Dow Jones	16.3	12.2	13.3	15.5	20.5
DataTimes	14.9	26.8	24.5	19.9	19.5
Dialog	26.4	22.3	18.5	15.0	16.2
CompuServe	38.0	39.4	41.6	26.5	13.0

TABLE 3
FREQUENCY OF USE OF ONLINE RESOURCES

Frequency	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Daily, more often	27.4%	28.9%	36.9%	51.8%	63.2%
Weekly, more often	12.1	22.0	25.8	28.8	25.4
Monthly, more often	3.6	9.8	12.9	4.9	2.7
Less than monthly	1.4	5.8	4.3	7.1	3.8
Missing / never used	38.9	33.8	20.2	5.3	4.9
Other	17.3	——	——	——	——

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TABLE 4
CAR SKILLS IN NEWSROOMS

Category	1998
General online	70.8%
World Wide Web	60.5
Spreadsheet	59.5
Word processing	55.1
Database skills	53.0
Windows-Macintosh operating systems	28.1
Mapping	4.9
Graphics	3.2
Other	2.2
N =	185

TABLE 5
NEXT CAR TOOLS TO ACQUIRE

Category	1995	1996	1997	1998
Database software	15.8%	11.4%	15.4%	31.1%
Any new hardware	47.3	38.6	30.1	19.3
Mapping software	9.9	12.1	12.5	14.3
WWW-Intranet tools	4.1	1.7	2.2	9.2
Internet connection	11.0	11.3	5.1	5.9
Training	1.2	3.0	10.3	5.9
Other new software	4.7	6.8	4.4	4.2
Statistics software	1.8	6.1	2.2	2.5
Programming software	2.9	3.0	2.9	2.5
Data	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.7
N =	172	132	136	119
Missing (not responding) =	115	101	90	66

TABLE 6
LEADING STORY SUBJECTS

Category	1995	1996	1997	1998
Schools, education	8.0%	11.5%	9.1%	14.8%
Elections	4.0	10.8	12.6	10.7
Local economy, spending	8.7	10.1	5.6	6.6
Real estate, property	2.0	2.2	2.1	6.6
Population trends	3.3	2.9	1.4	4.1
Courts, sentencing	6.7	4.3	2.8	4.1
General crime data	8.7	2.2	2.2	3.3
Traffic tickets	5.3	2.9	5.6	3.3
N =	150	136	143	122
Missing (not responding) =	137	94	83	63

Note: First-listed responses only.

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TABLE 7
LEADING CAR ADVANTAGES

Category	1996	1997	1998
Speed	19.6%	25.0%	20.5%
Extends reporting, research	21.0	25.6	18.9
Analysis, interpretation	15.9	12.8	18.0
More completeness, depth	18.8	14.1	15.6
Assess databases	5.8	5.1	5.7
Levels playing field	1.4	0.0	5.7
More precision	1.4	1.9	4.9
Better background	4.3	0.0	3.3
More authoritative	1.4	4.5	2.5
Prepare enterprise stories	0.0	1.3	1.6
Double check government	4.3	3.8	0.0
N =	138	156	122
Missing (not responding) =	95	70	63

TABLE 8
LEADING CAR DISADVANTAGES

Category	1996	1997	1998
Time consuming	27.0%	38.0%	26.1%
Problems with data	3.2	7.7	13.9
Need expertise/training	10.3	2.1	11.3
Computer cannot do it all	16.7	16.9	9.6
Cannot confirm information	0.0	2.8	7.8
Less people focused	4.0	7.0	5.2
Steep learning curve	9.5	7.0	5.2
Easy to make mistakes	9.5	7.0	4.3
Intimidating to some	7.9	0.7	0.9
Cost	7.9	6.3	3.5
Data not local	0/0	0.0	3.5
Not all data available	1.6	0.7	2.6
Unrealistic expectations	0.0	2.1	2.6
Mistakes can be big	0.0	0.7	2.6
N =	126	142	115
Missing (not responding) =	107	84	70

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Do You Admit or Deny?

An experiment in public perceptions of politicians accused of scandal

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DO YOU ADMIT OR DENY?
AN EXPERIMENT IN PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICIANS ACCUSED OF SCANDAL

Abstract

Scandal news has assumed an increasingly significant role in politics in recent years. Adapting the expectancy-value model to a new arena, this study examines the effects of three factors on politician evaluation: level of evidence, severity of the scandal, and the politician's response. All three have a significant effect. It appears that denial is the best policy – at least in the short run. A predicted interaction between evidence and response was not significant.

Introduction

It is now widely known that John F. Kennedy had a number of extramarital affairs while he was in the White House. This was common knowledge among the Washington press corps at the time, Ben Bradlee (1995) writes, but no reporter considered filing a story about the affairs.

The news media, once forgiving and even protective of politicians' peccadilloes, is no longer so understanding. The mainstream news media now consider personal political scandals fair game for coverage. From an historical perspective, political scientist Larry Sabato (1991) studies the media's frenzied "pack journalism" response to political scandals. With Web sites like the Drudge Report making end runs around mainstream gatekeepers, Larry Flynt offering a fortune for stories of sexual scandal, and politicians themselves conducting "opposition research" to find the skeletons in competitors' closets, scandals are likely to become increasingly important in American politics.

Perhaps equally important is the question of how to respond to scandalous allegations. Questioned about affairs, Democratic front-runner Gary Hart dared the press to "put a tail" on him in 1988, which it did, spoiling his chances for the presidency. In 1992, candidate Bill Clinton went on "60 Minutes" and defused the Gennifer Flowers scandal by admitting that he had caused pain in his marriage (without admitting to an affair with Flowers). But in 1998 his months of denials, in court and in public, that he had had "sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky" fueled the drive for his impeachment. His job approval ratings remained high, but perceptions of him as a moral and trustworthy man were damaged (Dell'Orto, Meirick and Wan, 1998).

This study sets out to investigate the consequences of admitting or denying a scandal accusation on people's evaluation of the politician involved. We also consider other factors relevant to the scandal because we suspect that those factors may affect evaluation of the politician or interact with the politician's response.

Literature Review, Variables and Hypotheses

While the public relations crisis management literature has addressed a similar question for corporations, there is little or no research on crisis management for politicians. The corporate crisis management literature, such as Fearn-Banks (1998) and Gottschalk (1993), stresses not so much the nature of the response as the immediacy of it, offering case studies of successful (e.g. Tylenol tampering and Diet Pepsi syringe scare) and unsuccessful (e.g. Exxon Valdez and PanAm Flight 103 bombing) campaigns. Crisis management experts emphasize the need of a crisis management plan to anticipate crisis situations, take responsibility, respond promptly and accurately to media inquiries, and avoid public panic. In a crisis, honesty is the best policy, experts agree.

There has been substantial research on how people evaluate other people, and in particular, politicians. While issue positions and party affiliation play a role, recent research has emphasized the role of trait perceptions (Rahn et al., 1990; Johnston et al., 1992). Typically, politician traits are partitioned into two dimensions: competence and character. Competence traits include such dimensions as knowledgeability, intelligence, leadership and vision. Character traits include trustworthiness, morality, compassion and caring for people (Johnston et al., 1992). Competence traits tend to be more important in determining overall evaluation. We will use evaluations of competence, character and overall evaluation as our main dependent variable.

Research in political science and cognitive psychology has addressed the impact of negative information on the evaluations of candidates. Lau (1984) argues that negative information has a disproportionate effect, carrying more weight than positive information. Most research on negative political advertisements finds that the subject of an attack ad suffers in subsequent evaluations (e.g., Kaid and Boydston, 1987; Garramone, 1984). A few studies have looked more specifically at scandal news as a particular kind of negative information, with competence and character as key factors in evaluation. Stoker (1993) uses public opinion polls in examining the Gary Hart scandal; moral conservatives tended to consider Hart's affair an indictment of his judgment and restraint – and hence competence – rather than merely a reflection of poor moral character. Dell'Orto, Meirick and Wan (1998) finds that while President Clinton's job approval ratings remained high in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, his overall approval ratings (and especially trait ratings for morality and trustworthiness) are significantly lower.

Funk (1996) uses a 2x2 experimental design to examine the effects of two scandals (extramarital affair or tax evasion) on two types of politician (high competence/ low warmth or low competence/high warmth). Funk finds that the competent politician is less affected by scandal than the warm one. She also finds that the tax evasion scandal was more damaging than the extramarital affair. Funk (1996) considered the two types of scandals to be just an internal replication and made no predictions about differences between them, although her pilot tests also indicated that tax evasion would be more damaging. We believe that these findings suggest an important dimension in the effect of a scandal – its severity.

Given this empirical finding, we offer two rationales for severity of scandal as one independent variable. The first is common sense, which suggests that a speeding ticket will cause less damage to a politician than an allegation of domestic abuse, for example. The other is theoretical, derived from the expectancy-value model (Fishbein and Azjen, 1975). This model of attitude and behavioral change suggests that the evaluation of a certain attribute be multiplied by the subjective probability that the object has that attribute in order to determine, in part, a change in attitude toward the object. In the case of scandal, we can conceive of severity as the evaluation of a scandal and subjective probability as the perceived likelihood that the scandalous allegation is true. The product of severity and perceived likelihood of scandal should then predict the magnitude of change in overall evaluation of the politician in question. This leads us to our first hypotheses: H1: Post-scandal evaluation of a politician will be lower for high-severity scandals than for low-severity scandals.

H1a: The magnitude of change in pre-scandal to post-scandal evaluation of a politician will be greater for high-severity scandals than for low-severity scandals.

The expectancy-value model suggests that the level of certainty, the perceived likelihood of scandal, may play an equally important role in the impact of a scandal. The EV model provides theoretical rationale for predictions. Again, common sense provides another rationale: allegations that President Clinton had Vince Foster murdered did little if any damage to him – despite the severity of the allegation – because very few people believed a word of it. In addition, the vast literature on source credibility (e.g., Anderson and Clevenger, 1963; Greenberg and Miller, 1966) has shown that attitude change depends in part on how likely it is that people think a message can be believed. In this experiment, we attempt to manipulate certainty by varying the amount of evidence supporting the allegation. This leads us to our second hypotheses: H2: Post-scandal evaluation of a politician will be lower for high-evidence groups than for low-evidence groups.

H1a: The magnitude of change in pre-scandal to post-scandal evaluation of a politician will be greater for high-evidence groups than for low-evidence groups.

The politician's response to an allegation should also affect evaluation, in part by affecting perceived likelihood of scandal. Admission should remove all doubt that he did what he is accused of, while denial should increase doubt. Admission, then, should result in a greater change in evaluation than denial. Hence our third set of hypotheses:

H3: Post-scandal evaluation of a politician will be lower when the politician admits a scandal than when he denies it.

H3a: The magnitude of change in pre-scandal to post-scandal evaluation of a politician will be greater when the politician admits a scandal then when he denies it.

At first glance, we may appear to be suggesting that denial is always the best policy. However, rhetoricians say denials are best used when they are plausible, and politicians involved in politically sensitive situations strive to maintain "plausible deniability." Campbell and Jamieson (1990) argue that denials are ineffective in the face of overwhelming evidence. Notice that President Clinton denied his affair with Monica Lewinsky until DNA tests were released that conclusively linked him to stains on Lewinsky's infamous blue dress.

This suggests an interaction between response and level of evidence on evaluation. There are two reasons that this might be the case. The first relies on an expectancy value model. A denial introduces a second element of wrongdoing – lying. An admission concedes the fact of the scandal, but it is presumed to be truthful. A denial typically increases doubt about the allegation, but it also introduces doubt about truthfulness; that is, if after hearing a denial you are 51 percent sure that a politician cheated on his taxes, you are also 51 percent sure that he lied when he denied cheating on his taxes. When the perceived likelihood of a scandal becomes a certainty, the perceived likelihood of lying about the scandal is likewise certain. At that point, it is better to be seen as an adulterer than an adulterer who is also a liar. Secondly, if trait perceptions are a source of politician evaluation, a politician who admits a scandal may be seen as more trustworthy than one who doesn't, especially when evidence is very high (and when the scandal itself does not involve deceit).

This logic suggests that while denial is the best option when there is little or no evidence, admission may be better when evidence is very high. At the very least, it suggests that the effectiveness of denial is greatly affected by levels of evidence, while the effectiveness of admission is less so. (See Figure 1.) Hence our fourth hypotheses:

H4: Response and level of evidence will interact such that the difference in post-scandal evaluation between low-evidence and high-evidence scenarios will be greater when the politician denies the scandal than when he admits it.

H4a: Response and level of evidence will interact such that the difference in evaluation change scores (pre- to post-scandal) between low-evidence and high-evidence scenarios will be greater when the politician denies the scandal than when he admits it.

Research Design

The final experiment used a 2x2x2 factorial design with severity (high and low), evidence (high and low) and response (admit and deny) as independent variables, and several measures of politician evaluation as the dependent variables. The high severity scandal was defined as domestic violence and the low severity scandal was defined as extra-marital affair. High-evidence scenarios reported the scandal with a longer and more prominent faux newspaper story that contained more details and more credible allegations, while low-evidence conditions read of the scandal allegation in a short news brief.

The final experiment instrument was administered via pencil and paper questionnaire to about 260 college students in the two sessions of an introductory course to journalism and mass communication. Each individual was randomly assigned to one of the eight treatments. Respondents first rated the seriousness of a number of scandal types (including the two involved in the study, both as a control variable in individual-level analyses and as a manipulation check on scandal severity) and the importance of several personal traits for a politician. Next, they were then given background information about a fictional Congressman from another state, Rep. John Mason, and were asked to evaluate him as a person, as a leader, and overall as a pre-test of the main dependent variable. All subjects were given the same politician profile. His political affiliation was not identified.

On the third page, they read what appeared to be a story clipped out of a newspaper that reported one of the two allegations with one of the two levels of evidence. They were asked how likely they thought it was that the allegation was true and how strong they thought the evidence in the story was, both for later individual-level analysis and for a check on the evidence manipulation. On the fourth page, they read what was described as a transcript of the politician's statement at a news conference, containing either an admission or a denial of the allegation. They were then asked a number of questions evaluating the politician. Finally, the respondents were asked for demographic information.

Operationalization

Independent variables

Response: We acknowledge that there are countless ways to admit or deny an allegation, so creating the responses was a methodological challenge. We set out to create pure, unequivocal responses that nonetheless adopt similar rhetorical strategies. All responses begin with an introduction that stresses the speaker's forthrightness in confronting the allegation, and all responses end with a plea for restored confidence and an attempt to move beyond the scandal. In this way we try to control for dimensions in the response other than the fact of admission or denial itself. Likewise, the admission for domestic violence is virtually identical to the one for extramarital affair, and the same can be said for the denials.

Severity: We wished to have two levels of severity, high and low. As a manipulation of severity of scandal, we chose two types of scandals based in part on scores for perceived seriousness in a pilot test. We chose extramarital affair as our low-severity scandal and domestic abuse as our high-severity scandal. Both scandals involve conduct outside of official duties, and both call character into question more than competence. It may be that scandals impugning competence and official conduct, such as plagiarism or bribery, may have different effects than scandals impugning character alone. This is a dimension that we chose to control in this study by using two personal scandals and varying their strength, as Funk (1996) did.

As a manipulation check before subjects were exposed to the treatments with different types of scandals and politician's responses, they were asked to rate the seriousness of eight types of political scandals on a 1-to-7 scale. Domestic violence was rated to be the most serious with a mean of 6.22, and extramarital affair was second lowest at 4.19; sexual preference was perceived to be the least serious with a mean of 2.42. This suggests that our severity manipulation was successful.

Evidence: We set out through our evidence manipulation to create two levels of certainty about the scandal allegation, low and high. However, we felt that extreme manipulations would not be meaningful, because they would create situations where a politician admits to something no one believes he did or denies something everyone is certain he did. Rarely do these extreme levels occur in the real world, especially when a scandal first breaks. So we decided to set our evidence levels at a moderately low and a moderately high level.

Initially, we attempted to manipulate evidence levels while holding scandal report length constant. The high evidence scenario contained stronger and more important facts suggesting the high believability of the scandal, whereas the low evidence scenario was constructed by weakening and taking out those facts, replacing them with background information in order to keep the length similar. This initial manipulation of the amount of evidence was ineffective in a pilot test of 42 students. The subjects in different evidence conditions had identical ratings for the likelihood of the scandal.

Keeping in mind that our ultimate goal for this manipulation was to create different levels of certainty, we decided to abandon our control on length of story. The final manipulation consists of a short news brief apparently from an inside page for the low condition and a longer bylined article from the front page for the high condition. The high condition for each scandal contains evidence that is both stronger and more plentiful. The reports have the layout and syntax of newspaper stories and are presented as coming from the Tallahassee Times, a real-sounding but fictional newspaper. The researchers strove for verisimilitude so that the subjects would take the experiment more seriously.

Two measures served as a manipulation check and provide individual level data for later analysis. The question "How likely do you think it is that Rep. John Mason (did what he was accused of)?" was our measure of perceived likelihood of scandal, and was answered on a 0-10 scale. The second question, using the same scale, asked for the perceived strength of the evidence: "In your opinion, how strong is the evidence that Rep. John Mason (did what he is accused of)?"

As we had found in a second pilot test, the efforts to manipulate levels of evidence produced the desired effects (see Table 1). In both the domestic violence and the sex scandals, the projected high evidence groups did perceive the level of evidence to be stronger and low evidence groups weaker. The mean differences of 3.24 between domestic violence high evidence and low evidence groups and of 2.04 between sex scandal high evidence and low evidence groups are both statistically significant ($p<0.01$, two-tailed). The same held true for perceived likelihood of scandal, with the high evidence group scoring 2.08 points higher than the low evidence group in the domestic violence scandal and 0.57 points higher in the sex scandal.

Unfortunately, we did not achieve the same level of difference between high evidence and low evidence groups across both scandals. The differences (1.20 strength of evidence and 1.51 for likelihood of scandal) between the two levels of evidence ([domestic violence high evidence - domestic low evidence] - [sex scandal high evidence - sex scandal low evidence]) are statistically significant ($p<0.05$, two-tailed).

Dependent variables

Politician evaluation is measured with three main items: overall impression, impression as a person and impression as a leader. These three items are measured before the scandal is introduced and after the politician responds to the charge, which creates change scores that we examine as well. We also measure projected future effectiveness of the leader and perceived honesty, both measured after the response to the scandal.

Overall impression: This is analogous to overall evaluation "feeling thermometers" in the National Election Surveys. Favorability is rated on a 1-to-7 scale, as are all but two of our measures.

Impression as a leader: This item was meant to capture the subject's job-specific favorability toward the politician, which might otherwise be measured by perceptions of competence traits like leadership, intelligence and knowledge. We preferred this one item to a list of competence traits because we feared sensitization with repeated measures in a short time span.

Impression as a person: This item, derived from a newspaper polling question, is meant to encapsulate the subject's response to the politician's character traits, such as morality, compassion and trustworthiness. As with impression as a leader, the same rationale for the single question versus multiple trait perception questions applies here.

Honesty: We made one exception to our avoidance of specific trait measures because this one seemed particularly relevant and sensitive to the issue of admission or denial. The wording is: "How much would you say the word 'honest' applies to Rep. John Mason?"

Projected effectiveness in the future: This item is conceptually separate from the ones listed above because it asks subjects to speculate on the scandal's political fallout – i.e., how *other people* will respond to the politician after the scandal. Future effectiveness is frequently a rationale in calling for the resignation of a scandal-afflicted politician, so we felt it was important to measure here. This item also may provide the basis for a third-person effect inquiry in the future.

Other variables

The previously mentioned manipulation check items – perceived severity of scandals, perceived strength of evidence and perceived likelihood of scandal – may also be useful for within-subject analyses. The same holds true for other variables:

Perceived importance of traits: This asks the subject to rate the importance of six traits "for a successful politician." There are three competence traits (leadership, intelligence and knowledgeability) and three character traits (trustworthiness, morality and compassion).

Affective response: Abelson, Kinder, Peters and Fiske (1982) argue that the emotions that a person feels when thinking about a politician are as or more important than perceptions of the politician's traits. We measured three relevant emotions after the politician's response to the scandal: anger, sympathy and uneasiness. The format for the question was, "When you think of Rep. John Mason, how _______ do you feel?" accompanied by a 1-to-7 scale.

Demographics: To ensure randomness of group assignment and for individual analyses, we measured gender, political party affiliation, ethnicity, U.S. citizenship and year in school.

Findings

In the final test, 258 students completed the questionnaires in class. All but one student provided answers to most of the questions and this resulted in 257 useable responses. The distribution of the number of respondents in each of the eight treatment groups ranges from 28 (Treatment Group 5) to 34 (Treatment Groups 3, 4, and 6) (see Table 2).

(Insert Table 2 about here)

As may be expected in typical Liberal Arts classes, a majority of the participants were females (67.6%). Freshmen and sophomore represented 32.4% and 40.2% of the respondents. Among the respondents, 48% identified themselves as Democrats and 24% reported themselves to be Republicans while Reform Party members made up about 7.3% of the total. Most of the subjects were Caucasians (82.7%) and US citizens (94.9%).

Before subjects were exposed to the treatments with different types of scandals and politician's responses, they were asked to rate the seriousness of eight types of scandals in their impressions of politicians in general (see the discussion of the severity manipulation) and to evaluate the importance of six traits to successful politicians. Trustworthiness and leadership are rated the most important traits with politicians with a mean of 6.59 and 6.58 on a 7-point Likert scale. Compassion matters the least (a mean of 5.89) (See Table 3 for details).

(Insert Tables 3 about here)

All subjects were then asked to read a prepared profile of the politician, John Mason. The profile produced a fairly favorable impression among the respondents. General impression of John Mason had a mean of 5.75 and a standard deviation of 0.91, while general impression of Mason as a person and as a leader score a mean value of 5.74 and 5.63 respectively with a standard deviation of 1.00 for both on a 7-point Likert scale of favorability (7 being most favorable). No significant differences exist in the perceptions of the politician between genders or among party affiliations.

Subjects were asked to provide their evaluations of the politician after Mason's response to the scandal. Questions, on a 7-point Likert scale (1=Not at all favorable and 7=Extremely favorable), included respondents' general impressions of Mason, impressions of Mason as a leader, as a person, and how effective Mason will be in the future. Findings are summarized in Table 4 for all eight treatment groups. In all but one item (i.e., effectiveness of future leadership, in which high evidence sex scandal scenario is slightly higher than low evidence denial sex scandal as well as the low evidence denial domestic violence scenario), evaluations of the politician are the most favorable for the low evidence sex scandal denial scenario and the next most favorable for the low evidence denial domestic violence case. Evaluations are at the lowest level for the high evidence domestic violence admission group.

(Table 4 about here)

Repeated measures were adopted in the questionnaire to test subjects' attitude change at different stages of the scandal. Questions were asked at two times - one after the subjects were exposed to the profile of the politician and one after the politician's response to the scandal - about the subjects' overall impression of John Mason, their impression of Mason as a leader and impression of Mason as a person. Attitude changes among the respondents are summarized in Table 5. Subjects' favorability of Mason changes the most with all three questions in the domestic violence high evidence admission scenario and the least change occurs in the sex scandal low evidence denial group. This is consistent with findings reported in Table 4.

(Insert Table 5 about here)

In all one of the four sex scandal groups (low evidence admission), there is a significant change in respondents' attitude toward the politician as a leader. By a contrast, attitudes change significantly in all four but one (low evidence denial) domestic violence groups in the perception of the politician as a leader, notwithstanding admission or denial on the part of the politician. Also, there are differences between admission and denial in the sex scandal cases, despite the levels of evidence against the politician. The overall evaluations of the politician change significantly in admission cases when the scandal is a certainty but no significant attitude changes occur toward the general evaluation in the denial cases, which may result in uncertainty or disbelief among respondents.

In Hypothesis 1, we predict that post-scandal evaluation of the politician will be lower for high-severity scandals than for low-severity scandals. This hypothesis is supported by our findings with all the four questions asking about respondents' evaluations of the different aspects of the politician. All differences between high-severity scandals (i.e., domestic violence) and low-severity scandals (i.e., extramarital affair) are significant at the p-0.01 level (one-tailed) (see Table 6 for details).

(Insert Table 6 about here)

H1a predicts that the magnitude of change in pre-scandal to post-scandal evaluation of the politician will be greater for high severity scandals than for low severity scandals. This finds support in our findings, which are reported in Table 7. Differences between attitude change in the overall evaluation of the politician, subjects' impression of the politician as a leader and as a person are all statistically significant at the p-0.001 level (one-tailed).

Hypothesis 2 posits that high evidence scenarios will lead to less favorable evaluation of the politician than low evidence scenarios. The findings support all four evaluation questions in the questionnaire - differences in overall impression and impression of the politician as a person are significant at the p-0.01 level while differences in respondents' impression of Mason as a person and the effectiveness of his future leadership are significantly lower in high evidence groups than low evidence groups at the p-0.05 level (see Table 6).

In Hypothesis 2a, it is expected that attitude change in pre- to post-scandal evaluation of the politician will be higher for high evidence groups than for low evidence groups. This is only partially supported by the findings. Attitude does not change significantly for subjects' impression of the politician as a leader (Table 7).

(Insert Table 7 about here)

The results show that evaluation of the politician is lower for the admission groups than for the denial groups in all four evaluation questions at the p-0.01 level (one-tailed), which is the prediction of Hypothesis 3. This may be attributed to the fact that when the politician who is accused of a scandal stands forward and admits everything, people generally believe the truth of the scandal and no more uncertainty exists as to what the facts are, whereas in the denial cases, people may have different feelings about the truth of the accusation and different levels of uncertainty may exist among the public so that they are less definite in taking a side and in making an evaluation of either the accuser or the accused.

Consistent with the above findings, attitude change in the admission scenarios is significantly greater than the denial cases in respondents' overall impression of the politician, their impression of the politician as a leader and as a person ($p<0.01$, one-tailed). Thus Hypothesis 3a is also supported.

In Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 4a, we expect an interaction effect between levels of evidence and politician's responses to the scandal. ANOVA tests indeed indicate that significant difference exists among the different evidence-response groups ($p<0.01$ for all four evaluation questions and for all three attitude change questions). However, the differences do not go in the directions we predict in the hypothesis - the difference in post-scandal evaluation between low-evidence and high-evidence scenarios is not significantly greater for the denial cases than for the admission cases (H4), and attitude change scores between denials and admissions in low-evidence vs. high evidence cases does not approach statistical significance (Table 8). Hence H4 and H4a fail to gain support in our data.

(Insert Table 8 about here)

Conclusion

In our experimental design, we tried to create two different kinds of scandals which are perceived to be at different levels of severity for public officials – domestic violence on the high severity side and extramarital affair on the low severity side. In order to test the possible consequences of scandals for politicians, we used two kinds of responses in the design: admission and denial. Meanwhile, we manipulated the level of evidence, which resulted in a high evidence scenario and low evidence scenario for each type of scandals. Each of these manipulations had the expected effect, which lends preliminary support for our adaptation of the expectancy-value model to the arena of scandal reports and responses. While the main effect findings for level of evidence and severity are admittedly far from earth-shaking, the finding for response runs counter to the conventional wisdom in public relations crisis management. (More on that in a moment.)

Our final hypothesis predicting an interaction between evidence and response was not supported. Denials were more affected by level of evidence than admissions, but not significantly so; higher evidence also led to lower evaluations in admission scenarios, where perceived likelihood of scandal was already a certainty. It may be that the high-evidence scenarios were more vivid by virtue of containing more factual detail, thereby increasing not only the perceived likelihood but also the perceived severity of the scandal.

As noted earlier, our evidence manipulation was not consistent in effect across the low and high-severity scandals. In the domestic violence scenario, high evidence groups put the likelihood of a scandal at 2.08 points higher than the low evidence groups. But in the sex scenario, the high and low evidence groups were only a half-point apart on perceived likelihood of scandal. This may merely reflect the smaller gap in the perceived strength of the evidence that the sex scenario had. Or it may reflect a public propensity in post-Lewinsky America to believe even flimsy sex allegations made against politicians. A Time/CNN poll taken in December found that 37 percent believed members of Congress were more likely than the average married man to commit adultery, compared to 7 percent who thought they were less likely. A third, more intriguing possibility is that severe allegations arouse more cognitive dissonance and require a higher level of evidence before the accusation is deemed likely and a pre-existing attitude is revised. In any case, this unexpected and enigmatic result will require further study.

Our findings show that subjects' evaluations of the politician involved in a scandal are the lowest for high evidence scenarios when the politician admits that the accusation is true for both domestic violence and extramarital affair. Attitude toward the politician also changes the most, from favorable to unfavorable, in the high evidence admission groups.

The data indicate that evaluation of a politician involved in a scandal perceived to be more serious is lower than that of a politician involved in a scandal considered to be less serious. The same pattern is also found in respondents' attitude change toward the politician. This study also finds that when the level of evidence is higher, evaluation of the politician tends to be lower, regardless of the nature of the scandal.

It seems that evaluation of the politician is generally lower and attitude changes more from favorable to unfavorable for admission groups than for denial groups. This finding appears to suggest that denial, not necessarily honesty, is the best policy – at least when scandal first breaks. However, this finding should not be interpreted as an endorsement of denying a true allegation. Our experiment simulates only part of the scandal process; rarely is a politician's denial the end of the matter. As Sabato (1991) observes, today's news media are relentless in their pursuit of scandal. Subsequent revelations by the media may well undo a temporary drop in the public's perceived likelihood of scandal effected by a denial and may thus increase perceptions of dishonesty. We have not included in the experimental design a scenario which shows the subjects that what the politician denies is actually true; neither have we created a clear-cut situation where the level of uncertainty is reduced to minimum. The different situations posited above will be interesting topics for future research.

Lastly, we do not claim our experimental design replicates real-life situations. Generalization here is limited by our use of a student sample, the compressed time period of the scenarios, and the subjects' lack of prior knowledge of the fictional politician.

Figure 1: Predicted interaction of evidence and response

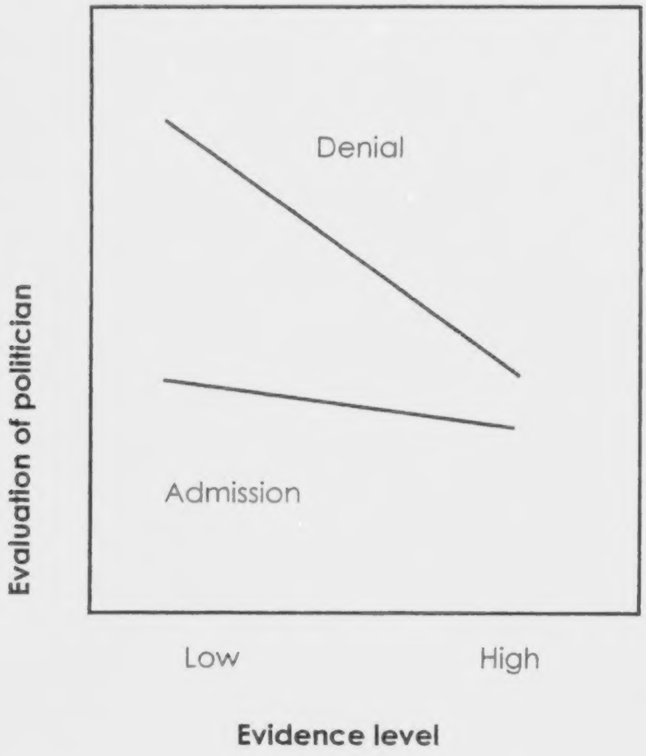

TABLE 1: EVIDENCE STRENGTH AND LIKELIHOOD OF SCANDAL

Evidence Group	**Number**	Strength of Evidence (In your opinion, how strong is the evidence that Rep. John Mason had the extramarital affair?) (0-10 scale, 0=very unlikely, 10=very likely)		**Likelihood of Scandal** (How likely do you think it is that Rep. John Mason had the extramarital affair?) (0-10 scale, 0=very unlikely, 10=very likely)		**Mean Difference**	**t-value**	**p-value** (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.			
1. Domestic violence high evidence	65	5.37	2.33	6.74	1.85	(Group 1 *vs*. Group 2) Strength of evidence 3.24 Likelihood of scandal 2.08	8.81 6.22	p<0.001 p<0.001
2. Domestic violence low evidence	68	2.13	1.89	4.66	1.64			
3. Sex scandal high evidence	62	5.48	1.7	5.9	1.55	(Group 3 *vs*. Group 4) Strength of evidence 2.04 Likelihood of scandal 0.57	6.87 2.08	p<0.001 p<0.05
4. Sex scandal low evidence	63	3.44	1.96	5.33	1.5			

TABLE 2: TREATMENT GROUPS

1	Domestic Violence	High	Admission	32
2	Domestic Violence	High	Denial	32
3	Domestic Violence	Low	Admission	34
4	Domestic Violence	Low	Denial	34
5	Sex Scandal	High	Admission	28
6	Sex Scandal	High	Denial	34
7	Sex Scandal	Low	Admission	32
8	Sex Scandal	Low	Denial	31
Total: 8	2	2	2	257

TABLE 3: IMPORTANCE OF TRAITS AND SERIOUSNESS OF SCANDAL TYPES FOR POLITICIANS

Variable Name	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Scandal types			
Domestic Violence	257	6.22	1.08
Drunk-driving	257	5.73	1.29
Bribery	256	5.56	1.14
Income-tax Evasion	257	5.46	1.27
Campaign Literature	257	5.13	1.40
Plagiarism	257	4.95	1.79
Drug Use	257	4.19	1.77
Extra-marital Affair	257	2.42	1.78
Sexual Preference			
Trait Types			
Trustworthiness	257	6.59	0.71
Leadership	257	6.58	0.64
Intelligence	257	6.38	0.83
Knowledgeability	257	6.35	0.82
Morality	257	6.03	1.19
Compassion	257	5.89	1.14

Note: Subjects were asked to rank on a 7-point Likert scale. For the scandal type questions, 1=Not at all serious, 7=Extremely serious; for the trait questions, 1=Not at all important, 7=Extremely important.

TABLE 4: EVALUATIONS OF THE POLITICIAN FOR ALL EIGHT TREATMENT GROUPS

Treatment Groups	Number of Subjects	Overall Impression	Impression as a Leader	Impression as a Person	Effectiveness of leadership in the future
1. Domestic violence high evidence admission	32	mean 3.56 std. dev. 1.44	mean 4.41 std. dev. 1.74	mean 3.28 std. dev. 1.69	mean 4.72 std. dev. 1.46
2. Domestic violence high evidence denial	32	mean 4.38 std. dev. 1.56	mean 4.91 std. dev. 1.53	mean 4.06 std. dev. 1.74	mean 4.93 std. dev. 1.51
3. Domestic violence low evidence admission	34	mean 4.06 std. dev. 1.25	mean 4.91 std. dev. 1.36	mean 3.71 std. dev. 1.47	mean 4.74 std. dev. 1.33
4. Domestic violence low evidence denial	34	mean 5.47 std. dev. 0.79	mean 5.62 std. dev. 0.92	mean 5.35 std. dev. 0.95	mean 5.65 std. dev. 0.92
5. Sex scandal high evidence admission	28	mean 4.50 std. dev. 1.20	mean 5.43 std. dev. 1.10	mean 3.89 std. dev. 1.26	mean 5.14 std. dev. 1.08
6. Sex scandal high evidence Denial	34	mean 5.24 std. dev. 0.78	mean 5.41 std. dev. 0.82	mean 5.26 std. dev. 1.21	mean 5.71 std. dev. 0.84
7. Sex scandal low evidence admission	32	mean 4.78 std. dev. 1.24	mean 5.28 std. dev. 1.25	mean 4.09 std. dev. 1.57	mean 5.53 std. dev. 1.11
8. Sex scandal low evidence denial	31	mean 5.52 std. dev. 0.85	mean 5.68 std. dev. 0.75	mean 5.39 std. dev. 0.88	mean 5.68 std. dev. 0.75

Note: Questions are asked on a 7-point Likert scale. 1=Not at all favorable, 7=Extremely favorable.

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TABLE 5: Attitude Changes in the Treatment Groups (Paired t-test)

Treatment Group	Variable	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value (2-tailed)
1. Domestic Violence High Evidence Admission	1. Overall impression of politician	2.19	7.48	$p<0.001$
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	1.16	3.86	$p<0.001$
	3. Impression of politician as a person	2.53	6.79	$p<0.001$
2. Domestic Violence High Evidence Denial	1. Overall impression of politician	1.50	5.49	$p<0.001$
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	0.94	3.44	$p<0.01$
	3. Impression of politician as a person	1.59	5.62	$p<0.001$
3. Domestic Violence Low Evidence Admission	1. Overall impression of politician	1.56	6.22	$p<0.001$
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	0.68	2.58	$p<0.05$
	3. Impression of politician as a person	1.88	6.52	$p<0.001$
4. Domestic Violence Low Evidence Denial	1. Overall impression of politician	0.26	1.79	$p<0.10$*
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	0.03	0.17	n.s.**
	3. Impression of politician as a person	0.47	2.69	$p<0.05$
5. Sex Scandal High Evidence Admission	1. Overall impression of politician	1.36	5.26	$p<0.001$
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	0.39	1.52	n.s.**
	3. Impression of politician as a person	1.93	6.34	$p<0.001$
6. Sex Scandal High Evidence Denial	1. Overall impression of politician	0.26	1.86	$p<0.10$*
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	-0.06	-0.35	n.s.**
	3. Impression of politician as a person	0.24	1.07	n.s.**
7. Sex Scandal Low Evidence Admission	1. Overall impression of politician	1.22	4.74	$p<0.01$
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	0.63	2.33	$p<0.05$
	3. Impression of politician as a person	1.91	5.76	$p<0.01$
8. Sex Scandal Low Evidence Denial	1. Overall impression of politician	0.16	0.87	n.s.*
	2. Impression of politician as a leader	0.35	-1.79	$p<0.10$*
	3. Impression of politician as a person	-0.39	2.25	$p<0.05$

Note: *Not significant at the p-0.05 level.

**Not significant at the p-0.10 level.

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TABLE 6: DIFFERENCES IN EVALUATION OF THE POLITICIAN BETWEEN DIFFERENT SCENARIO TREATMENT GROUPS

Treatment Groups	Evaluation of Politician	Mean Difference	df	t-value	p-value (0ne-tailed)
H1: High Severity Scandals (Domestic Violence) vs. Low Severity Scandals (Extramarital Affair)	1. Overall impression of politician	-0.65	255	-4.01	p<0.001
	2. Impression as a leader	-0.48	255	-3.05	p<0.01
	3. Impression as a person	-0.57	255	-2.98	p<0.01
	4. Effectiveness of future leadership	-0.51	253	-3.46	p<0.001
H2: High Evidence Groups (1, 2, 5, 6) *vs.* Low Evidence Groups (3, 4, 7, 8)	1. Overall impression of politician	-0.52	255	-3.18	p<0.001
	2. Impression as a leader	-0.33	255	-2.11	p<0.05
	3. Impression as a person	-0.48	255	-2.45	p<0.01
	4. Effectiveness of future leadership	-0.25	253	-1.67	p<0.05
H3: Admission Groups (1, 3, 5, 7) *vs.* Denial Groups (2, 4, 6, 8)	1. Overall impression of politician	-0.94	255	-6.05	p<0.001
	2. Impression as a leader	-0.41	255	-2.62	p<0.01
	3. Impression as a person	-1.28	255	-7.17	p<0.001
	4. Effectiveness of future leadership	-0.48	253	-3.24	p<0.001

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TABLE 7: ATTITUDE CHANGE AMONG RESPONDENTS BETWEEN DIFFERENT SCENARIO TREATMENT GROUPS

Treatment Groups	Change in Evaluation of Politician	Change Difference	df	t-value	p-value (one-tailed)
H1a: High Severity Scandals (Domestic Violence) vs. Low Severity Scandals (Extramarital Affair)	1. Change in overall impression of politician	0.64	255	3.55	$p<0.001$
	2. Change in impression as a leader	0.44	255	2.48	$p<0.01$
	3. Change in impression as a person	0.53	255	2.48	$p<0.01$
H2a: High Evidence Groups (1, 2, 5, 6) *vs.* Low Evidence Groups (3, 4, 7, 8)	1. Change in overall impression of politician	0.50	255	2.77	$p<0.01$
	2. Change in impression as a leader	0.24	255	1.34	$p<0.10$*
	3. Change in impression as a person	0.08	255	1.75	$p<0.05$
H3a: Admission Groups (1, 3, 5, 7) *vs.* Denial Groups (2, 4, 6, 8)	1. Change in overall impression of politician	1.05	255	6.10	$p<0.001$
	2. Change in impression as a leader	0.53	255	3.04	$p<0.01$
	3. Change in impression as a person	1.41	255	7.07	$p<0.001$

Note: *Not statistically significant at the p-0.05 level (one-tailed).

TABLE 8: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DENIAL AND ADMISSION IN LOW EVIDENCE AND HIGH EVIDENCE SCENARIOS

[Contrast=(Denial low evidence groups - Denial high evidence groups) - (Admission low evidence groups - Admission high evidence groups)]

Variable	Value of contrast	t-value	df	Significance (One-tailed)
1. Overall impression of politician	0.27	0.87	253	$p>0.10$*
2. Impression as a leader	0.27	0.87	253	$p>0.10$*
3. Impression as a person	0.36	1.02	253	$p>0.10$*
4. Effectiveness of future leadership	0.11	0.38	251	$p>0.10$*
1. Change in overall impression of politician	-0.24	-0.72	253	$p>0.10$*
2. Change in impression as a leader	-0.003	-0.10	253	$p>0.10$*
3. Change in impression as a person	-0.12	-0.31	253	$p>0.10$*

Note: *Not statistically significant at the p-0.10 level.

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Drudging Up the News:
The Drudge Report and Its Use of Sources

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Drudging Up the News:
The Drudge Report and Its Use of Sources

Abstract

The media are undergoing a re-evaluation of their standards and practices in the wake of the Clinton scandal. One concern of traditional journalists is the impact of Internet sites, such as *The Drudge Report*, on their profession. Many point to Drudge as a major player in the erosion of media standards of not using anonymous sources. This study examines the types of stories posted on Drudge's site and the sources used early in the scandal. It shows Drudge's level of dependence on unnamed sources in his reports, as well as his reliance on traditional news media sources.

Introduction

In the wake of the scandal surrounding President Bill Clinton's relationship with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, the news media is undergoing a re-evaluation of its standards and practices in covering the story. There is significant evidence that the media has legitimate reasons to be concerned about how its coverage has affected the public's trust and belief in the credibility in the Fourth Estate.

A recent Freedom Forum analysis found that the top two adjectives used to describe news coverage as "excessive" and "embarrassing."[1] The most prevalent criticisms about the media's work have surrounded the media's practices in recent months toward using anonymous sources. A study by the Committee of Concerned Journalists, which examined the first five days of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, found that 21 percent of all the reporting studied in the first five days of the story were based on anonymous sources. Single anonymous sources accounted for 40 percent of those stories using anonymous sources, flying directly in the face of the traditional two-source convention in journalism for story publication.[2]

A poll performed by the Pew Research Center indicated that anonymous reporting during the scandal coverage had a negative impact on the public's perception of the news, with 65 percent of the public respondents stating they believed that the news media had done only a fair or poor job of carefully checking the facts in reporting the scandal.

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[1] J. D. Lasica, "Slow Down and Make Sure It's Right," *American Journalism Review* 20 (April 1998): 56

[2] William Powers, "When Anonymous Sources Get It Right," *National Journal (INJO)* 30 (1 February 1999): 462.

Failure to verify facts and release of unsubstantiated rumors was the top complaint among those who were critical of the way the story was handled by the media.[3]

Many journalists point to the Internet as a major factor in the erosion of publication standards, as the possibility of around-the-clock release of information has sped up the editorial process to new extremes.[4]

"The Internet is a gun to the head of the responsible media," said Jonathan Fenby, editor of the South China Morning Daily in Hong Kong. "If you choose not to report a story, the Internet will."[5]

During the recent scandal, the site that journalists have cited most often as representing the dangers represented by the Internet to responsible journalism has been Matt Drudge and his World Wide Web site, *The Drudge Report*.[6] Drudge, a former CBS gift shop manager, began writing stories in an e-mail newsletter. It has now developed into a site that is visited by thousands of daily readers.[7] Drudge develops his stories from reading 35 daily newspapers, wire services reports, and reading more than a 1,000 various tidbits passed on by both visible and anonymous sources through his e-mail.[8]

Drudge has made his name, however, by breaking news stories before the traditional media have done so. His first major credits included CBS' firing of Connie Chung, and correctly identifying Jack Kemp as Robert Dole's running mate for the 1996 presidential election. He posted the death of Princess Diana on his web site minutes before the networks got to the story.[9] He also broke a story that Vice President Al Gore misused White House resources to set up a Web domain in preparation for a presidential bid in 2000.[10] Drudge, however, became a well-known media player after being the first to break the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal when *Newsweek* decided to hold publication of the story at the last minute.[11] He followed those stories with breaking news on Kathleen Willey's allegations against Clinton, and was the first to report that there was DNA evidence in the case.[12]

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[3] "What the Polls Say," *Quill* 86 (March 1998): 26.

[4] Bill Kirtz, "What Other Journalists Say: Some Thoughts About the Job We've Done and About the Job Ahead of Us To Do," *The Quill* 86 (March 1998): 31

[5] "What We Do Now (Media Coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal)," *Columbia Journalism Review* 36 (March-April 1998): 25.

[6] URL: http://www.drudgereport.com

[7] Reader statistics for *The Drudge Report* are available at (http://www.drudgereport.com/visits.htm). From February 23, 1999, to March 25, 1999, the *Drudge Report* received more than 18 million "hits," or visits, to its web site.

Drudge calls his capacity to reach the public at any moment the major component in his popularity: "It's a populist movement changing the access to news, the ability to report. It came along just at the right time."[13] Drudge's page, which is a mix of political, entertainment and national news, is a nexus of links to many of the established newspapers and radio and wire services – the *Associated Press*, *ABC News* and *Forbes Magazine*, to name a few – and political pundits, such as Arianna Huffington, George Will and Ellen Goodman. Drudge also has links established to many of the online entertainment sites, such as *Daily Variety*, *People Magazine* and *Hollywood Reporter*.

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[8] "Anyone With A Modem Can Report On The World," Matt Drudge's Address Before the National Press Club, 2 June 1998. Available online at http://www.frontpagemag.com/archives/drudge/drudge.htm

[9] K.L. Billingsley, "Free Matt Drudge," *Heterodoxy*, October 1997. Available online at www.cspc.org.

[10] Maria Seminerio, "Drudge hits Gore for Web Misdeeds," *The Zenet News Channel*, 20 January 1998. Available online at http://www.zdnet.com.

[11] For a complete report on the media timeline of *The Drudge Report's* scoop of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, see Seth Stevenson, "Invisible Ink: How the Story Everyone's Talking About Stayed Out of the Papers," *Slate*, 22 January 1998. Available online at http://www.cspc.org/drudge/mdinfo.html

[12] Adam Cohen, "The Press and the Dress," *Time* 151 (16 February 1998): 52

[13] K.L. Billingsley, "Free Matt Drudge."

Drudge claims to have seven million regular readers, but says he makes little or no profit from his enterprise.[14]

Sidney Blumenthal, the communication advisor to Clinton, is suing Drudge after reporting that unnamed Republican "operatives" said Blumenthal was a wife-beater and that there were court records to prove it. However, the records did not exist, and a day later, Drudge posted a retraction and apology to his story, saying, "I think I've been had."[15] However, Blumenthal filed a $30 million libel suit, for $10 million in compensatory damages and $20 million of punitive damages, against Drudge and America Online, an Internet company that also posts his daily reports.[16]

Journalists point to the lawsuit triggered by Drudge's reliance on sources he did not identify and refused to name afterwards, along with his own statements that his reports are only accurate "eighty percent of the time," as reasons why Drudge's reporting is held in such low contempt by most media members.[17]

In traditional media circles, Drudge has been generally pilloried[18] and accused of being "Clinton crazy."[19] Andie Tucher, associate editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review*, said that "Some of what he does is responsible journalism, some is not. However, the blurring of lines in the way he does is particularly scary."[20] Others in the media, such as *Time* contributor Michael Kinsley, see some value in cyberspace writers such as Drudge: "… there ought to be a middle ground between the highest standards (of journalistic ethics) and none at all. And the Internet, which can be sort of halfway between a private conversation and formal publication, is a good place for that middle ground."[21]

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[14] Anyone With A Modem Can Report On The World," Matt Drudge's Address Before the National Press Club, 2 June 1998. Available online at http://www.frontpagemag.com/archives/drudge/drudge.htm

[15] Hearst, 14.

[16] K.L. Billingsley, "Free Matt Drudge." Blumenthal's suit against AOL has since been thrown out of court.

[17] Andrew Hearst, "Is AOL Responsible for its Hip Shooter's Bullets? (Libel Suit Filed Against Online Service America Online)," *Columbia Journalism Review* 36 (Nov-Dec. 1997): 14. Drudge, in his address before the National Press Club in June, 1998, said he was misquoted (available online at http://www.frontpagemag.com/archives/drudge/drudge.htm).

[18] Susan Estrich, "White House Pops Susan Estrich for *USA Today* Op-Ed on Drudge," *USA Today*, 26 November 1997. Available online at http://www.cspc.org/drudge/estrich3.html

[19] Howard Kurtz, "*The Drudge Report*: Indignation," *The Washington Post*, 16 October 1997, B1.

[20] "Matt Drudge's Maverick Journalism Jars Internet," *USA Today*, 9 March 1997: Life 1.

Drudge said he believes his type of citizen reporting is the wave of the future, and journalists' attacks against him are self-serving and hypocritical, especially in light of the problems of "reputable" mainstream media outlets, such as *the Dallas Morning News'* retraction in its Clinton scandal coverage, and lawsuits levied against CNN for its Operation Tailhook special, and NBC for its fingering of William Jewell for the Atlanta Olympic park bombing.[22]

Drudge, while saying that he is not a professional journalist, does view himself as a heir to John Peter Zenger, who won a pioneering victory for press freedom in colonial America: "I don't maintain that I am licensed or have credentials. I created my own. I don't know what the problem is with that. It seems to me the more freedoms we have the better off we are."[23]

Steve Geimann, past president of the Society of Professional Journalists and chair of its ethics committee, said he believes the rush that developed in the news media to cut corners and break new aspects of the story led to a feeding frenzy which damaged journalism's long-term credibility with the public:

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[21] Michael Kinsley, "In Defense of Matt Drudge," *Time*, 2 February 1998. Available online at http://www.pathfinder.com/time/magazine/1998/dome/980202/kinsley.html

[22] "Anyone With A Modem Can Report On the World." Available online at http://www.frontpagemag.com/archives/drudge/drudge.htm

"Instead of seeking truth – the foundation of the SPJ Code of Ethics – newspaper and broadcast journalists were more interested in copying and chasing each other," Geimann said. "… some journalists published leaks with only passing clarification about the source's agenda. Instead of thoughtfully sifting through facts, statements and other disclosures, it sometimes seemed reporters were worried more about speedy dissemination of the latest tidbit than determining what's true, what's accurate and what's relevant."[24]

A national poll of senior journalists by the *Columbia Journalism Review* found that the scandal had initiated a wholesale reappraisal of news handling in newsrooms across the country, with unverified stories as one of their top concerns.[25]

Drudge's use of unnamed sources, lack of multiple sources in his reports[26] and record of false or misleading reports has made many segments of the mainstream media deride his work,[27] but a recent study of Internet news usage suggested that the public doesn't see a credibility gap for online news against its traditional competitors. It might, instead, see it as generally more credible than its conventional counterparts.

A Pew Center poll found that 49 percent of American Web users say Internet news is more accurate than news found in traditional print or broadcast sources. A study by Jupiter Communications found that 80 percent of U.S. online consumers trust online

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[23] "Anyone With A Modem Can Report On the World." Available online at http://www.frontpagemag.com/archives/drudge/drudge.htm

[24] Steve Geimann, "Not Our Finest Hour," *Quill* 86 (March 1998): 24.

[25] Neil Hickey, "After Monica: What Next?" *Columbia Journalism Review* (November/December 1998): 33.

[26] Drudge, in an article by Paul Starobin ("Here's a Yarn You've Maybe Already Heard," *National Journal* 29: (17 May 1997): 987) says that in his case, multiple sources for stories are unnecessary: "Sometimes the only source is myself; I saw something."

news as much as news in newspapers, broadcast television, and cable news outlets. An additional seven percent viewed online news as more reliable than other media.[28]

Drudge, as a representative of an embryonic form of media, presents a series of important questions and challenges for the mainstream media concerning the relationship between news, journalism and the public. There is no doubt that the Internet, and its ability for its users, whatever their expertise and qualifications, to publish to a mass audience of readers 24 hours a day has had an effect on the other, more traditional media, especially in the case of the presidential scandal of 1998-99.

Seth Stevenson of *Slate* said in the case of the Lewinsky scandal, "Would the story have broken if not for the Web? Probably. Did the Web give the story additional velocity? Definitely. The ethics cops who patrol newspaper and magazine newsrooms can't control the rumors and unsubstantiated stories that people post to the Web. … If the Web prints it and television goes with it, print must follow."[29]

But what types of stories is *The Drudge Report* printing, and how does an Internet news source like it measure up to the standards and ideals of its traditional counterparts, particularly in the area of publishing stories with anonymous sources?

Objectives

This project proceeded with the intent of shedding some comparative light between the new breed of online reporters and the traditional media by examining

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[27] Media critic Jon Katz said ("An Escape From Media Hell: 5 Ethical Rules of Behavior Could Reform Media, Help Journalists Better Understand What People Think," *The Quill* 86 (March, 1998): 28.) that "… nobody confuses Matt Drudge or conspiracy theory sites with The New York Times, or ever will."
[28] "From Novelty to Mainstream," *Editor and Publisher mediainfo.com: Journal of the Online News Industry* (February 1999): 36.
[29] Seth Stevenson, "Invisible Ink:"

Drudge's posted content and use of sources in his stories, using the following research questions to direct the study:

- What type of news is being disseminated in *The Drudge Report*? How many of its stories are straight news, entertainment, or blur the line between the two?
- How many of Drudge's news reports use identified sources, versus the number that are not identified? What types of sources does he utilize in his reports?

Methodology

A content analysis[30] was performed on the postings of Matt Drudge on his web site. The sample as defined for the study were postings from *The Drudge Report* over three months, from January 1, 1998, to March 30, 1998, a period which coincides with the early reporting stages of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. Only content authored by Drudge was examined; links and stories posted from other news sites were excluded from the analysis.

Story type; the timeliness of the news printed (breaking story or non-breaking) and story source were the units of analysis, utilizing the coding sheet in Appendix A. The resulting data generated was entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet then analyzed using an SPSS statistical software package. Descriptive statistics and relevant cross-tabulations were performed. A significance level of $p > .05$ were used for chi-square evaluations.

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[30] Roger D. Wimmer and Joseph R. Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction* (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth, Inc., 1991): 161-177.

Analysis

The story content of *The Drudge Report* in the selected study period generated 102 stories for analysis, 34 in January, 45 in February and 23 in March. Tables 1-3 and Appendix B describe the nature of the content of Drudge's reports. Table 1 breaks down the content based on whether the story topic was national or international in focus:

Table 1

```
National or International?
                                                      Valid     Cum
Value Label                 Value  Frequency  Percent  Percent  Percent

national                        1         96     94.1     94.1     94.1
international                   2          6      5.9      5.9    100.0
                                    -------  -------  -------
                            Total        102    100.0    100.0

Valid cases      102      Missing cases       0
```

Almost 95 percent of *The Drudge Report* stories were nationally focused, while only 6 of 102 stories were news of an international scope. Table 2 describes whether Drudge claimed his stories contained exclusive (breaking) or non-exclusive material:

Table 2

```
Exclusive or Non-exclusive?
                                                      Valid     Cum
Value Label                 Value  Frequency  Percent  Percent  Percent

yes                             1         35     34.3     34.3     34.3
no                              2         67     65.7     65.7    100.0
                                    -------  -------  -------
                            Total        102    100.0    100.0

Valid cases      102      Missing cases       0
```

During the sample period, Drudge claimed 34.3 percent of his stories were breaking stories, commonly labeling such a report as an "Exclusive" or a "World

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Exclusive."[31] Almost two-thirds of Drudge's reports, 65.7 percent, were not claimed as journalistic "scoops" during when they were posted.

Appendix B breaks down the story content by subject matter. It shows that the majority of subject matter (53 percent) posted by Drudge was related to Clinton administration scandal. Non scandal-related government and political stories, and stories related to entertainment, are tied distantly for second with 12 percent. Stories relating to the news media or both the political and media spheres tied for third with nine percent. Other story types made up five percent of the stories posted. Table 3 shows whether the source of the story was identified by name in the text of the report:

Table 3

```
Is Source Identified?
                                                       Valid     Cum
Value Label                 Value  Frequency  Percent  Percent  Percent

yes                             1         57     55.9     55.9     55.9
no                              2         45     44.1     44.1    100.0
                                    -------  -------  -------
                            Total        102    100.0    100.0

Valid cases      102     Missing cases      0
```

Table 3 indicates that the majority of the stories (55.9 percent) published on *The Drudge Report* do have named sources to back up their content. Forty-five of the 102 stories (44.1 percent) did not name a source.

Appendix C shows what field of expertise the source of the story came from, both named and unnamed sources. Traditional news media accounted for the preponderance of

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[31] The November, 1998 edition of *Brill's Content* (available online at http://www.brillscontent.com/features/cryer_1198.html) reported in an article entitled "Town Crier For the New Age," that the number of "scoops" and exclusive reports claimed by Drudge is misleading, false or open to interpretation. Of the 51 stories reviewed from January-September 1998, 31 stories that were labeled as exclusives actually were, 10 (32 percent) were untrue and/or never happened, 11 (36 percent were true, and the exclusive nature of another 10 (32 percent is debatable or still unknown.

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Drudge's sources – 55.6 percent. Political sources accounted for 12.1 percent, entertainment sources accounted for 8.1 percent, other sources accounted for 4.1 percent, while 20.2 percent of story sources could not be determined.

Tables 4 and 5 detail source identification. Table 4 examines the identification of sources by whether Drudge claimed the story as an exclusive or non-exclusive story:

Table 4

```
IDENTIFY  Is Source Identified?  by EXCLUSIVE STORY  Breaking news?

                     EXCLUSIVE
            Count   |
          Row Pct  |yes       no
          Col Pct  |                   Row
          Tot Pct  |        1|       2| Total
IDENTIFY  ----  ---+---------+--------+
                1  |    11   |   46   |   57
  yes              |  19.3   |  80.7  |  55.9
                   |  31.4   |  68.7  |
                   |  10.8   |  45.1  |
                   +---------+--------+
                2  |    24   |   21   |   45
  no               |  53.3   |  46.7  |  44.1
                   |  68.6   |  31.3  |
                   |  23.5   |  20.6  |
                   +---------+--------+
           Column      35        67      102
            Total    34.3      65.7    100.0

Chi-Square                        Value             DF             Significance
--------------------           -----------         ----              ---------
Pearson                           12.92404            1                  .00032
Continuity Correction             11.45813            1                  .00071
Likelihood Ratio                  13.08904            1                  .00030
Mantel-Haenszel test for          12.79734            1                  .00035
      linear association
```

Table 4 shows that 68.6 percent of stories that Drudge claimed as exclusive stories did not provide an identity for the source, while 31.4 percent had an identity. For stories of a non-breaking nature, 68.7 percent had a source provided in the content of the story. This comparison was significant at the p > .0003 level. Table 5 examined the identification of sources by the stories related to government scandal:

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Table 5

```
IDENTITY  Is Source Identified?  by  SCANDAL  Clinton/Gov. Scandal or Not?

                      SCANDAL
               Count  |
             Row Pct  |yes       no
             Col Pct  |                   Row
             Tot Pct  |        1|        2| Total
IDENTIFY     --------+--------+--------+
                   1  |    24  |    33  |    57
  yes                 |  42.1  |  57.9  |  55.9
                      ,  45.3  |  67.3  |
                      |  23.5  |  32.4  |
                      +--------+--------+
                   2  |    29  |    16  |    45
  no                  |  64.4  |  35.6  |  44.1
                      |  54.7  |  32.7  |
                      |  28.4  |  15.7  |
                      +--------+--------+
              Column      53       49      102
               Total    52.0     48.0    100.0

Chi-Square                          Value          DF            Significance
--------------------             -----------      ----            -----------
Pearson                             5.02748          1                 .02495
Continuity Correction               4.17236          1                 .04109
Likelihood Ratio                    5.07973          1                 .02421
Mantel-Haenszel test for            4.97819          1                 .02567
      linear association
```

A majority of stories (54.7 percent) on the series of scandals involving the White House did not have a source identified. However, this percentage was lower than stories that contained information of a breaking nature, as shown in Table 4 (68.6 percent). A two-thirds majority (67.3 percent) of stories posted that were not related to Clinton administration scandal identified their source. This comparison was significant at the p > .024 level. The data in Table 6 examined stories related to the White House scandals, and whether they were considered by Drudge of an exclusive or non-exclusive nature:

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Table 6

```
BREAKING  Exclusive Story  by  SCANDAL  Clinton/Gov. Scandal or Not?

                   SCANDAL
           Count  |
         Row Pct  |yes      no
         Col Pct  |                    Row
         Tot Pct  |       1|       2|  Total
BREAKING          --------+--------+--------+
               1  |    26  |     9  |    35
  yes             |  74.3  |  25.7  |  34.3
                  |  49.1  |  18.4  |
                  |  25.5  |   8.8  |
                  +--------+--------+
               2  |    27  |    40  |    67
  no              |  40.3  |  59.7  |  65.7
                  |  50.9  |  81.6  |
                  |  26.5  |  39.2  |
                  +--------+--------+
          Column      53       49      102
           Total    52.0     48.0    100.0

Chi-Square                        Value          DF              Significance

--------------------          -----------       ----              ----------
Pearson                         10.63903           1                  .00111
Continuity Correction            9.32101           1                  .00227
Likelihood Ratio                10.99856           1                  .00091
Mantel-Haenszel test for        10.53473           1                  .00117
      linear association
```

Almost three-quarters (74.3 percent) of *The Drudge Report's* White House scandal stories were considered breaking in nature. Only 18.4 percent of stories that were breaking in nature were of another story variety. This comparison was significant at the p > .001 level. Table 7 examined how many of the White House scandal stories were obtained by sources that could not be determined:

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Table 7

```
SCANDAL  Clinton/Gov. Scandal or Not?  by  NOTKNOWN  Unknown Source

                        NOTKNOWN
                Count  |
              Row Pct  |yes      no
              Col Pct  |                   Row
              Tot Pct  |        1|       2| Total
SCANDAL      ---------+---------+---------+
                   1   |    16   |    37   |   53
  yes                  |  30.2   |  69.8   |  52.0
                       |  80.0   |  45.1   |
                       |  15.7   |  36.3   |
                       +---------+---------+
                   2   |     4   |    45   |   49
  no                   |   8.2   |  91.8   |  48.0
                       |  20.0   |  54.9   |
                       |   3.9   |  44.1   |
                       +---------+---------+
               Column       20        82      102
                Total     19.6      80.4    100.0

Chi-Square                     Value         DF            Significance
--------------------        -----------     ----            ----------
Pearson                       7.83568         1                .00512
Continuity Correction         6.50070         1                .01078
Likelihood Ratio              8.33462         1                .00389
Mantel-Haenszel test for      7.75885         1                .00534
      linear association
```

A majority of the stories where there was an unnamed source used (80.0 percent) were related to the White House scandal, but those represented only 30.2 percent of the total stories written on the White House scandal. Conversely, in Drudge's stories not related to the White House scandal, only 8.2 percent had an unknown source. This comparison was significant at the p > .005 level. Table 8 examines the number of breaking or "exclusive" stories claimed by Drudge by the month in which they were published:

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Table 8

```
      BREAKING  Exclusive Story  by  DATE  What Month?
                        DATE
              Count   |
              Row Pct |January  February March
              Col Pct |                             Row
              Tot Pct |       1|        2|        3| Total
BREAKING      --------+--------+--------+--------+
                   1  |   18   |   13   |    4   |   35
  yes                 |  51.4  |  37.1  |  11.4  |  34.3
                      |  52.9  |  28.9  |  17.4  |
                      |  17.6  |  12.7  |   3.9  |
                      +--------+--------+--------+
                   2  |   16   |   32   |   19   |   67
  no                  |  23.9  |  47.8  |  28.4  |  65.7
                      |  47.1  |  71.1  |  82.6  |
                      |  15.7  |  31.4  |  18.6  |
                      +--------+--------+--------+
               Column     34       45       23      102
                Total   33.3     44.1     22.5    100.0

Chi-Square                      Value              DF              Significance
--------------------          -----------         ----             --------
Pearson                         8.74387             2                  .01263
Likelihood Ratio                8.81744             2                  .01217
Mantel-Haenszel test for        8.23012             1                  .00412
      linear association
```

A majority of the breaking or "exclusive" stories claimed by Drudge (51.4 percent of the total during the study period) occurred during the month of January. Drudge claimed he had 18 January "exclusives" out of the 34 stories he posted during that month, which represented only 33.3 percent of the total number of stories published.

Although Drudge posted 45 stories in February, 44.1 percent of the total number of stories during the study period, there were only 13 "exclusives" in that month, which represented 37.1 percent of his total number. Only 11.4 percent of stories that appeared in March were of the breaking-news variety, which was 3.9 percent of the total number of stories examined during the course of this study. This comparison was significant at the p > .012 level.

Two additional tests were performed. One compared the month of publication and the use of named and unnamed sources, which the other compared the month of publication and the publication of White House scandal stories. Neither test was significant at the p > .05 level.

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Conclusion

The results of this study suggest several things about the content *of The Drudge Report* and its use of sources:

■ Drudge's work during the study period was almost completely focused on the Clinton/White House scandal. More than half (53 percent) of his postings were dedicated to this one story.

■ Drudge's content is fairly consistent in its nature. When the percentage of White House scandal stories is added to stories that are government-related, they totaled 65 percent of all the stories that are written by Drudge. Only five percent of the stories published on the site did not fit into the media/government/entertainment spheres.

■ A majority (55.9 percent) of Drudge's stories do have identified sources. In the case of stories that were related to the White House scandal, only 45.3 percent had sources. Other types of stories had a source identified 67.3 percent of the time.

■ In the case of claimed "exclusives," only 31.4 percent had identified sources, while stories related to the White House scandals had their sources identified 20 percent of the time.

■ Although Drudge claimed that 34.3 percent of were breaking stories or exclusives, the greatest number of breaking stories that Drudge self-reported occurred in January 1998, the month in which Drudge beat *Newsweek* to its own story on the Clinton-Lewinsky relationship. Although Drudge claimed that 49.1 percent of his White House scandal coverage was exclusive or breaking news, his record on other types of stories is much lower (25.7 percent), suggesting that Drudge might have been a "one-hit wonder," especially as his total number of scoops dropped considerably after the scandal's early

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stages. Drudge seemed to be on the first wave, but had difficulty maintaining his momentum.

■ A majority of the stories (55.6 percent) posted on the web site come from sources that are identifiable as part of the news media. While Drudge's verified record for breaking news is fairly good, it is also obvious that most of his sources are within the traditional journalism community, namely newspapers and network newsrooms. Drudge is delivering stories that the traditional media have, but for some reason are not getting published or aired in their news cycle or let leak early for their own ends.

In essence, Drudge seems to be delivering a behind-the-scenes view of traditional journalists going about their business of gathering and reporting the news. Drudge allows members of the public that are interested to peer into the inner workings of that process.

Drudge's stories, the majority of which are in newspaper parlance, in "brief" form, are suited to breaking news and gossip. There is no doubt that he does not provide a larger context that the other forms of media have the capability to provide.

Are the views of many traditional journalists, who see Drudge as some kind of scourge on the journalistic world, well founded? Drudge's breaking news relies on a preponderance of unnamed sources, more than 40 percent of its overall total. However, the traditional media, as shown by the Committee of Concerned Journalists' recent study, has not been hesitant lately to use the same type of sources when called upon to chase the same types of developing stories that *The Drudge Report* is known for, although the data suggests that it is to a much lesser extent.

There are several possibilities for follow-up studies which would shed further light on these issues, including an examination of traditional journalists' attitudes toward publication with few or anonymous sources, compared to those who publish in an online environment. It would also be useful to know what the reading habits of traditional journalists are online, and the motivations behind the traditional journalists that act as sources for online reporters.

If this study is an indication, the end of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal might prove to be a challenge for *The Drudge Report* to remain relevant in the eyes of the press and the public. However, mainstream journalism has a task of it own, deciding how to embrace online media and deal with the challenges its represents, which could be the key to its own long-term future.

Appendix A

Coding Sheet for the Drudge Report

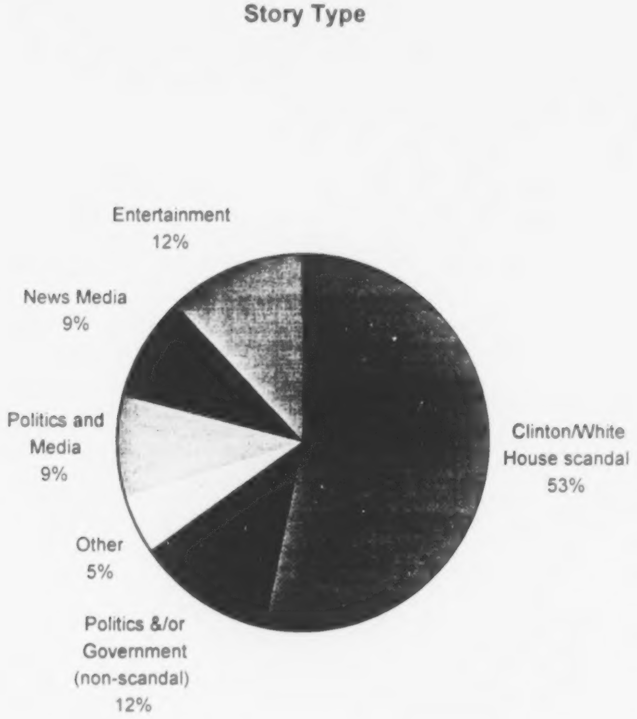
Story Content
1. Was the story national or international in nature?
    1 = national   2 = international
2. Was the story related to politics, government, or the military?
    1 = yes   2 = no
3. Was the story related to scandals involving President Clinton or the White House?
    1 = yes   2 = no
4. Was the story related to entertainment or the entertainment industry?
    1 = yes   2 = no
5. Was the story related to the news media?
    1 = yes   2 = no
6. Was the story a hybrid involving both the political and media spheres?
    1 = yes   2 = no
7. Was the story on another topic not related to questions 2-6?
    1 = yes   2 = no

Story timeliness
8. Was the story claimed by the author to be of a breaking nature (exclusive source, released before other media published the story, or story is not available from other sources) at the time of posting, or was it of a non-breaking nature?
    1 = Breaking   2 = Non-breaking

Story Source
9. Was the source of the story identified?
    1 = yes   2 = no
10. Was the story source related to the media?
    1 = yes   2 = no
11. Was the story source related to politics, government or the legal profession?
    1 = yes   2 = no
12. Was the story source related to the entertainment industry?
    1 = yes   2 = no
13. Was the story source not related to areas delineated in questions 10-12?
    1 = yes   2 = no
14. Was the story source not available or described?
    1 = yes   2 = no

Appendix B

Story Type by Category for The Drudge Report



January 1-March 30, 1998
N = 102

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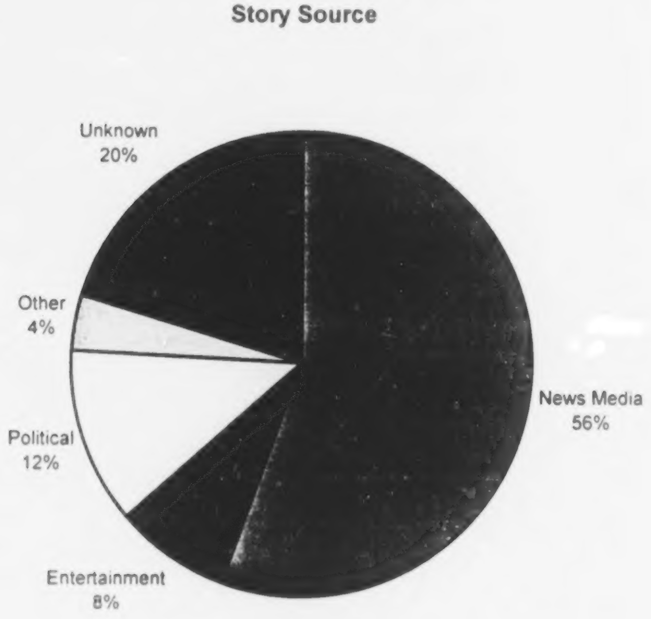
Appendix C

Story Source by Category for The Drudge Report



January 1-March 30, 1998
N = 102

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New Media, Old Values:

What Online Newspaper Journalists say is Important to Them

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Presented to
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This study seeks to advance the knowledge and understanding of the roles and values of online newspaper journalists. Using Weaver and Wilhoit's analysis of the functions that journalists in other media have rated as very important, the study examines the similarities and differences between the online and traditional environments and the journalists working within them. Findings led to the creation of an additional function – "marketing" -- that seems to be embraced by online newspaper journalists.

NEW MEDIA, OLD VALUES:

What Online Newspaper Journalists say is Important to Them

INTRODUCTION

"Nerdy looking youngsters"?

The Internet allows online journalists to post information almost as soon as they receive it. That rush to production has allowed rumor to pass as reporting and electronic publishing to pass for editing. One of the most serious charges that can be leveled against any journalist is that he or she has violated journalistic values of accuracy, balance and perspective that are a part of the profession's socialization (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996). For the online journalist, the temptation to bypass traditional journalistic processes may be all the more tempting since they are thought to be "nerdy looking youngsters" (Sullivan, 1999) and more likely to weigh technology and marketing over journalism (McClintick, 1998).

The story of Matt Drudge "breaking" the story of the Clinton/Lewinsky affair focused the world's attention on not only Drudge but also the journalism disseminated via the Internet. Salon's decision to publish a story about Sen. Henry Hyde's affair, 30 years after the fact, fueled speculation that online journalists were not only quick to publish, but willing to disseminate a story rejected by traditional media as not newsworthy. And in the case of the Dallas Morning News, their web site caused the newspaper the embarrassment of disseminating false information, for which they later apologized (Rieder, 1997). Drudge, Salon and the News' mistake aside, what are the journalistic values of those working in this new media environment? How do online journalists see themselves in relationship to traditional journalistic roles and functions? How fair are the characterizations of online journalists? Are they indeed younger, less experienced and perhaps less ethical than their traditional media counterparts? And while some may dismiss the appearance of such "journalists" as Drudge as peculiar to the new medium, it is a fact that more than 1,000 U.S. daily newspapers now have web sites (mediainfo.com, 1999).

Little is known about these journalists; it is only recently that attempts have been made to form an organization of online journalists. One of the organizers freely admits that his invitations were issued based on "who I knew and whose e-mail addresses I had in my address book" (Lasica, 1998a). One of the topics the group hopes to address soon is credibility of the online media. At the heart of that is, of course, the credibility of the journalists working in the new media. It stands to reason that the online media will reflect the values of those producing it (Byrd, 1996; Boyd, 1999). It therefore seems critical to study those journalists to learn not only who they are, but also what they believe is their role as journalists. If each of the more than 1,000 daily online newspapers had only one employee each, that alone would constitute a large and influential group of journalists. In addition, the potential audience for online media grows each day; it is currently estimated at 150 million worldwide (NUA, 1999).

Critics have expressed concern that cyberspace holds a host of problems and possibilities that journalists have not seen before (Lynch, 1998; Gubman & Greer, 1997; Mann, 1996; and Harper, 1996). The speed of dissemination, the potential worldwide audience, the possibilities for interactivity, competition from non-media companies and the increasing demand for profitability are changing the online environment (Borden & Harvey, 1998). How do online journalists view their roles and values in the midst of such a fast-paced and changing environment? How much influence does the online environment have compared to the traditional journalistic values? Is the online environment more of an influence than the media and company which employs these journalists? For example, do journalists employed by the New York Times Electronic Media Co. hold different views and values than those employed at the online site of the Naples (Florida) Daily News?

This paper seeks to advance the understanding of who is working as a journalist in the online media. It examines what they say is important to them as journalists and compares their responses to studies of journalists working in traditional media. The categories established by Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) of how journalists tend of view their roles serves as the base line for the study, but those studies occurred before the advent of the Internet and the journalists who now practice their trade on it.

Studies of how journalists view themselves remain critical to our understanding of the journalistic process. This study of online journalists fills a gap in the understanding of the American journalist.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional journalistic roles

Journalists' values have been the subject of many studies. Among the most valuable are the longitudinal studies conducted by Weaver and Wilhoit (1986, 1996). Their work drew on the earlier work of Lippmann (1922), Johnstone (1976) and many others who have studied the American journalist.. While each of these studies acknowledges a diverse journalistic workforce, they also were able to draw conclusions about the values and beliefs held by journalists.

Lippmann was among the first to call journalism a profession. He studied the mores, the traditions and limitations. He defended the role of the journalist and concluded that the need for professional values was necessary given the overwhelming amount of information confronting the public. In 1922, he wrote about the many voices journalists must interpret: "All of them do begin to demonstrate the need for interposing some form of expertness between the private citizen and the vast environment in which he is entangled" (p. 238). Nearly 80 years after writing later, it seems highly likely Lippmann would argue even more forcefully for a sense of professionalism within the vastness of the Internet. Lippmann wrote that it was due to the "routines" of the profession that the journalist managed to compile, compress and make coherent the events of the day.

Nearly three decades later, Breed (1955) undertook a study of the socialization process in the newsroom. Much like Lippmann, this study found that the organizational policies for production of the news often determined the roles and values in the newsroom, more so than any individual influences. The medium determined how the message was produced and how individuals in the organization saw themselves.

Johnstone and his colleagues (1972) advanced the understanding of journalists' values and roles further by describing who these journalists were in terms of race, gender, age, social and economic standings, and other demographic information. Those studies also sought to describe categories within the profession. The Johnstone studies found that some journalists adhered to the principles of "neutrality," seeing themselves as being mere channels of information. Others, however, saw themselves as "participants," whose role it was to sift through information to find and tell the story. Neutral journalists viewed their function as getting information out quickly, using only verified information, reaching the largest possible audience, and entertaining the audience. Johnstone characterized "participants" as more likely to see their roles as investigating government claims, providing analysis, dissecting national policies, and developing cultural/ intellectual interests. In his study, the size of the organization was a factor in journalists who tended to describe themselves as participants.

A decade late, Weaver and Wilhoit (1986) repeated many of the questions posed by Johnstone and his colleagues. They added two items to the index to measure an adversary role. Their study then developed three categories of how journalists tended to see themselves: (a) the interpretive function; (b) the dissemination function; and (c) the adversary function. Weaver and Wilhoit found that nearly 60% of their respondents scored very high in the interpretive function. Those journalists saw their role as investigating government claims, analyzing complex problems, and discussing national policy. The dissemination function was also rated highly, by nearly 50% of the respondents. Under this function, journalists tended to view their roles as getting information to the audience quickly and reaching the largest possible audience. In the 1986 study, only 17% of the journalists scored high on the adversary function, in which they described their role more in terms of serving as an adversary of government or of business. Since only a small number of their respondents fell exclusively in one category, the study determined that most journalists tended to view their roles as both interpreters and disseminators of information.

Those findings remained somewhat consistent when Weaver and Wilhoit repeated their study in the early 1990s. Their more recent study, however, creates a fourth cluster of functions – that of the "populist mobilizer" who sees her role as allowing the public to express views, helping the audience develop cultural interests, providing entertainment and setting the political agenda. The study found only about 6% of the respondents strongly held these views.

In a study of local television news, McManus (1994) visited four stations and reported a likelihood of what he termed "market-driven journalism." According to his study, he found that the stations driven by the market were competing not so much in the news environment, but in the larger "public attention market." McManus argued that when the same content cannot serve both the function of information and entertainment, the information function is displaced. Although McManus did not study the online environment, exploring those choices by online journalists would make an interesting study in this arena where some have argued that market forces are driving content.

The environment in which journalists worked also was studied by Weaver and Wilhoit, who found that the journalists' environment was a predictor of how they tended to view their role. They found differences among daily newspaper, weekly newspaper, magazine, wire, radio and television journalists. They also found differences between journalists working in larger organizations and those employed (the majority of respondents) at smaller outlets.

The Online Environment

The above studies found correlations between how journalists tended to view their roles and the media in which they worked. Print journalists, for example, were more likely to rate the adversarial function as more highly important than broadcasters. The organizational influence also was studied by Beam (1990), who found that the organization was the source of professional values and roles, not the individual journalists.

None of these studies included online journalists since they were conducted before the development of the World Wide Web. Articles about online journalists tend to be highly anecdotal (Frazier, 1998; Meyer, 1998, and Noack, 1998). While their numbers remain unknown, it is likely that given the abundance of online media sites, the total of online journalists numbers in the thousands. Some say there are as many as 10,000 online journalists (Glachant, 1996; Beddingfield, Bennefield, Chetwynd, Ito, Pollack & Wright, 1995). Following the development of the World Wide Web in 1993, the list of sites grows exponentially each year. While there are more than 1.5 million registered domain names, it is impossible to know how many Web pages now fill servers throughout the world. Media have been warned that their survival depends on knowing and using the resources of the Internet (Dizard, 1997; Negroponte, 1995; Fidler, 1997) and more join the online environment every day. In addition, the realm of the Internet is thought to possess its own sense of community and socialization (Fernback, 1997). Even the titles of the journalists working online reflect the new era: "Job descriptions and titles are becoming electric and eclectic. Webmasters, webmistresses, cyberhosts, and media jockeys are new occupations that simply did not exist before" (Hart, 1997, p. 8).

This relatively young media needs workers and there is a big demand for online journalists (Slatalla, 1995; Stepp, 1996). The term "online journalist" is now acceptable (Glachant, 1996) even though many of those journalists say they do not feel accepted by traditional journalists (Belsie,1996). The term typically includes anyone working with editorial content in the online environment, although the line between editorial and advertising/marketing functions has been found to blur more here than in traditional media (Singer, 1997; Peak, 1999).

Online managers say they need a mixture of skills to produce web pages – reporters, editors, photographers, designers and computer technicians (Brill, 1998). In some respects, the personnel needed to produce an online media product is not that different from that required for production of a newspaper. The difference lies more in their particular skills and in their attitude toward online journalism. Brill found that online journalists ranked the traditional skills of good news judgment, analytical thinking and good grammar and editing skills higher than the new media skills of computer design skills and knowledge of the Internet. That study, however, did not address how online journalists view their roles as journalists.

If the medium does make a difference in how journalists view their roles and functions, then it would seem to follow that the online environment would influence how those journalists see their roles.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study attempts to compare the roles and views of online journalists to those working in more traditional media. In particular, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do online journalists view the functions outlined by Weaver and Wilhoit and used to evaluate their roles and values?
2. Does the online environment (the medium) help predict differences in how journalists see their roles and values?
3. Are there other variables that help predict differences in online journalists' values and roles (i.e. demographic data)?
4. If the online journalists do not view their functions as similar to journalists working in traditional media outlets, what other function(s) might they be serving?
5. In general, how satisfied are online journalists with their roles and jobs?

METHOD

The author selected 12 online newspapers for this study. For the purposes of this study, the term "online journalism" was operationalized to describe these 12 online newspaper sites. These newspapers were selected based on their participation in a summer internship program involving new media students during the summer of 1997. The author chose to study these sites since access to the sites was assured; cooperation had been obtained before the study began.

Six journalists from each online newspaper were asked to complete a questionnaire. The journalists at each site were chosen at random by picking numbers from a box. Some of the online sites did not have six employees and in those cases, every journalists was asked to respond. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires and mail them back to the author in a SASE. Of the 72 questionnaires distributed, 66 were returned for a 92 percent response rate. That rate reaches 100 percent when the two sites with less than six employees are taken into account. In person interviews with at least two journalists at each site were used to complement the data (see appendix A for a list of the online newspapers). The author believes the site visits accounted for the high level of cooperation and participation. The managers and students/interns at each site also were helpful in encouraging employees to complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire focused on the roles and functions that these journalists saw themselves fulfilling. They were asked to rate different functions, as adapted from the Weaver and Wilhoit studies, on a scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (not important). Questionnaire respondents also were asked information about their newsroom operations, their ideas about the future of their product and online ventures in general, job satisfaction and demographic information.

Results were compiled and analyzed using SAS; and compared to earlier findings of how journalists viewed their functions. For comparison purposes, daily newspaper journalists were used as the comparison group. That group seemed most appropriate for two reasons: The online journalists in this study also were working for a daily newspaper company; and most of the content they work with is taken from that daily newspaper and originally produced by daily newspaper journalists.

FINDINGS

Comparison to functions reported by daily newspaper journalists

These online journalists reported that most of their work is similar to print journalists, with 83.3% citing strong agreement with that statement. As was found in

Brill's earlier study, these journalists ranked traditional journalism skills very high, with spelling and grammar skills topping the list (62.9% rated them as very important), followed by news judgment (66.2%). A non-traditional skill -- knowledge of the Internet -- was deemed very important by 64.6% of the respondents. The skills ranked as generally not important included reporting, generating story ideas and computer design skills. Interviews with respondents verified that most are not doing original work, so those skills would be considered less valuable in the online environment. When asked what traditional job title best describes their work, they chose primarily "editor" (54.5%), or copy editor (21.2%). However, it must be remembered that the respondents were working in sites operated by newspapers. In their official titles, most the them had some component of online activity – either a title preceded by "online" or "new media" or "digital."

Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Appendix B show the how daily print newspaper journalists view their functions; the tables also show the comparison to how the online journalists view those roles.

The print newspaper journalists and the online journalists were most closely aligned in how they viewed the dissemination function, with 50% of each agreeing that it was very important to avoid disseminating unverified facts. The other element of that function, getting information to the public quickly, was rated as very important by 70% of the print journalists and by 62% of the online. That's an interesting finding since the online journalists possess that capability much more than those working in print. One of the online journalists suggested that while dissemination speed remains a strength of the online media, they also recognize that speed cannot take precedent over the other factors of verification and balance of information. Indeed, another 25% of the online journalists rated this function as somewhat important. It's interesting to note here that when all crosstabulations were run on the four functions and all other variables, only two comparisons of significance were found: the first was that females were less likely than men to view the need to get information out as quickly as possible (p,<.05). The second occurred in the differences between males and females on the function of developing cultural interests and will be discussed in the populist mobilizer section.

The online journalists were not as likely as the print newspaper journalists to see themselves as either fulfilling the interpretive function or the adversarial function.

In comparison to the print journalists, 70% of whom said it was very important to investigate government claims, only 24% of the online journalists saw that as their role. Other components of the interpretive function found similar results: While 54% of the print journalists said that it was very important to analyze complex problems, only 35% agreed. And while 44% of the print respondents thought it was important to discuss national policy, only 21% of the online respondents agreed.

The adversarial function also differed between print and online journalists. Serving as an adversary of government was thought to be very important by 26% of the print journalists, but only 13% of those working online. Being an adversary of business was lower for both groups, with 17% of the print journalists rating it as very important, but only 6% of the online journalists seeing that function as very important.

In the 1996 study, Weaver and Wilhoit developed the populist mobilizer function and thought it might gain ground in future studies. The online journalists seemed to follow that trend in three of the four functions: letting the public express their views, providing entertainment and setting the political agenda. The did not, however, agree with print journalists on the importance of developing cultural interests. Online journalists said it was very important (59%) to let the public express itself, going beyond the 52% of print journalists who held similar views. As mentioned above, it was significant that females were less likely to see this as very important than men ($p<.01$). A female online manager suggested this might be a function of age, but that was not borne out in other analysis.

The largest gap in the populist mobilizer function appeared when 29% of the online journalists said it was very important to entertain the audience, compared to 16% of those working on daily newspapers. The development of cultural interests did not rate very highly be either group, but the print journalists (18%) rated it as very important more than did the online journalists (9%). Neither group rated the function of setting the political agenda very highly, but the online journalists (9%) rated it as very important more often that did the print journalists (5%). Several respondents said that in future studies, they would like to see that divided out among local, state and national political agendas since they view the local agenda as much more important than the others. Two of the newspapers in this study are considered "national" media, which may account for why this function was rated higher by the online journalists than the daily newspaper journalists in the Weaver and Wilhoit survey.

The development of another functional category: Marketing function

The trend toward populist mobilizer function that Weaver and Wilhoit speculated about in 1992 may have taken more of a turn into a function of marketing. When asked to rate aspects of appealing to the audience, online journalists gave the four items some of their highest agreement (see Table 5 in Appendix B). They saw as very important: competing with other media (42%); understanding the audience (60%), providing an alternative to other media (47%); and providing content for the widest possible audience (66%). Combined, those items serve to portray online journalists as very concerned with the functions of competition and appealing to a large audience, what could be termed performing a marketing function. Informal follow-up conversations with online journalists bore this out as many of them talked about competition from non-media and other companies.

They also talked about measuring the audience – the number of "hits" received each day was a topic discussed during every staff meeting and usually either posted on a company web site or somewhere in the newsroom. Indeed, these online journalists have learned to track not only their hourly audience, but in hourly and even quarter-hour increments. Many sites have responded to the tracking by setting their production schedules around those habits. They also have quickly learned to spend their time on sections where the hits are greatest, usually sports and community information, according to the online managers interviewed for this study.

Demographics

There are more young journalists working online than in the industry as a whole. In the Johnstone 1971 study, only 11% were under the age of 25; in Weaver and Wilhoit's 1992 study, that number dropped to 4%. A more recent study (Fitzgerald, 1997) found that the number of daily newspaper reporters over the age of 40 rose from

26% in 1988 to 44% in 1996. That study also found that the number of print reporters under the age of 30 had dropped during the same period from 29% to 20%. Of the online newspaper journalists who participated in this study, 25% were under the age of 25. On the other end of the age distribution, the number seems to be reflective of that gap: Of all journalists in 1992, 22% reported being older than 44; in the 1996 study, that number increased to 44%. However, in this study of online newspaper journalists, only 19% reported being over the age of 44 and 3% declined to give their age.

The age of the journalist is matched by that of the products they produce. Most of the sites have been in operation less than 18 months (65%); 11% were reported to have been online less than six months and another 17% were less than a year old. Only 35% had been online for more than 18 months.

Despite their young ages, the online journalists were aware that this area of journalism is not for everyone. When asked if a fear of technology would prevent someone from doing their job, 94% agreed. As for themselves, they reported being satisfied with their work (73%) and would encourage others to pursue a similar line of work (82%). They also see themselves, in five years, working either in an online newspaper (43%) or some other online product (31%). They view the future of online products as "very positive" (52%) or "positive" (38%). In contrast, the Voakes study (Fitzgerald, 1997) found that 55% of newspaper reporters in 1996 believed that newspapers will be a *less* important part of American life in 10 years.

The online journalists reflect a trend found in previous studies in terms of gender. In this study, 60% were male. While that number is smaller than the 1992 study, it follows a pattern: In 1971, 80% of the journalists were males; in 1982, that number dropped to 66%, where it remained in 1992.

In 1992, Weaver and Wilhoit found that of those with degrees, 35% had earned journalism degrees. In this study, 94% reported having a college degree and of those 57% claimed a journalism degree. Only 2% reported a computer science degree.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that these journalists are well compensated. Although 11% declined to provide income information, 32% of those who did respond reported making more than $50,000 annually. In 1991, the median income of all journalists was reported at $31,297; in the current study, 28% of the online journalists reported earning $30,000 or less. As would be expected, income was highly correlated with age.

DISCUSSION

This study of online newspaper journalists furthers understanding of this burgeoning field, but may offer a glimpse of what society may expect of them in terms of the products they produce. It also may be that they are not so much a "new breed" of journalist, but indicative of the trends spotted earlier this decade in the surveys done by Weaver and Wilhoit and others of U.S. journalists. This study provides a very limited look at the field of what may be thousands of online journalists. Questions were asked of only 66 journalists who are working in 12 online sites, all of them sponsored by daily newspapers. A look at the sites, listed in Appendix A, demonstrates that the sponsors of the participating sites ranged from the largest daily newspaper in the country (The Wall Street Journal) to the much small Naples, FL, Daily News. A much larger sample needs to be done in order to make more accurate generalizations. Yet, some interesting data can be reported.

In general, while the online journalists surveyed in this study adhere to some of the tenets of journalism, especially regarding necessary skills, they also view their roles and values somewhat differently than other journalists. And while it made sense with this particular sample of journalists to compare them to daily newspaper journalists, it would be interesting to see how they compare to broadcast and other journalists in their identification with the functions outlined in previous studies. Such a study also should include those online journalists not affiliated with a print product.

The online journalists did seem to identify with the dissemination function, as did the daily newspaper journalists. Unlike the print journalists, however, they do not seem to identify with the interpretive function. Neither the print nor online journalists seem to view the adversarial function as very important, although the print journalists were more than twice as likely to cite being an adversary of government or business as very important. The populist mobilizer function, which Weaver and Wilhoit saw as beginning to establish the spirit of "public journalism" was both more and less popular with online journalists. The functions of letting the public express views, setting the political agenda, and providing entertainment were considered more important by online journalists than by print. Print journalists, however, rated developing cultural interests of the audience as more important than did the online journalist.

Perhaps the most interesting function is one for which previous studies offer no benchmark – the marketing function. Reaching the largest possible audience and understanding the audience was considered very important by most of the online journalists surveyed in this study. At least two questions are raised by that finding: Are these online journalists typical of a broader sample? And, would journalists in other media also be found to serve this function in 1999? Will the changes occurring in the relationship between the editorial and business sides affect how journalists view their roles and values?

When crosstabulations were run on all the data, there were few significant relationships. Much more work needs to be done in the study of online journalists to determine the influence of the medium.

It will continue to be critical to understand online journalists and how their view their roles and functions. If some media analysts are to be believed, they may be the only journalists to study in the next century. Regardless, they do and will continue to have a vital role in the future of journalism and the society in which it operates. Their importance cannot be underestimated.

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Appendix A: LIST OF PARTICIPATING ONLINE SITES

Atlanta Journal Constitution: accessatlanta.com

Arizona (Tucson) Daily Star: azstarnet.com

Austin American Statesman: austin360.com

Columbus Dispatch: dispatch.com

Detroit Free Press: freep.com

Ft. Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel: southflorida.digitalcity.com

The Minneapolis Star Tribune: startribune.com

Naples Daily News: naplenews.com

San Jose Mercury News: sjmercury.com

The New York Times: nytimes.com

The Wall Street Journal: interactive.wsj. com

The Washington Post: washingtonpost.com

Appendix B: TABLES

Table 1: Interpretive function of print and online journalists

	Print Newspapers (%)	Online (%)
Analyze complex problems	54	35
Investigate official claims	70	24
Discuss national policy	44	21
	n=635	n=66

Table 2: Disseminator function

	Print Newspapers (%)	Online (%)
Get information to public	70	62
Avoid unverified facts	50	50
	n=635	n=66

Table 3: Adversarial function

	Print Newspapers (%)	Online (%)
Adversary of government	26	13
Adversary of business	17	6
	n=629	n=66

Table 4: Populist mobilizer function

	Print Newspapers (%)	Online (%)
Let public express views	52	59
Develop cultural interests	18	9
Entertain	16	29
Set political agenda	5	9
	n=635	n=66

Table 5: Beyond populist mobilizer to marketing function

	Online (%)
Compete with other media	42
Understand the audience	60
Provide alternative to other media	47
Content for widest possible audience	66
	n=66

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Migrant workers: Myth or Reality?
A Case Study of News Narrative in English-Language Thai Newspapers, *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post*, during Asian economic crisis 1997

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Abstract

The paper examines news coverage of migrant workers from Indochina and Burma that appeared in two Thailand's English-language dailies – *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post* – during the 1997 Asian economic crisis. The Thai media's use of news narratives reflects bias against migrant workers. The narrative patterns, the author argues, can be traced to the pro-nationalist history of Thailand written in the 1930s, and maybe seen as perpetuating stereotypes about Thailand's neighboring countries.

Introduction

The 1997 financial crisis in Southeast Asia offers an opportunity for this researcher to study news patterns and narratives in mass-circulated English-language Thai newspapers – *The Nation* and *Bangkok Post*. In an analysis of news stories about migrant workers from Indochina and Burma, that were published in the two English-language Thai dailies during the period of economic difficulties, we see the media's use of news patterns and historical narrative to make meaning of news in ways that reflect bias against these migrant workers. Thai journalists employ news narratives to tell stories about outsiders that fit into a socially-and- culturally-constructed frame of "them" versus "us." The narrative patterns, the author will argue, can be traced to the pro-nationalist history of Thailand written by the 1930s, and may be seen as perpetuating stereotypes about Thailand's foreign neighbors.

In retrospect, uneven development in Southeast Asia and the economic boom of the late 1980s to the mid-1990s contributed to an influx of labor into Thailand from some of its poorer, formerly communist neighbors, including Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. Between 1993 and 1997, the Thai government granted work permits to roughly 600,000 foreign workers in an effort to alleviate domestic labor shortages. Mostly unskilled labor, they found work in low-paying industries largely shunned by Thais, such as farm work, fishing, salt farming, building construction, and rice mills. In spite of the large number of such permits, a daily English-language Thai newspaper, *The Nation*, reported that nearly one million of these laborers were working illegally ("Thailand to deport 300,000 illegal," Jan. 16, 1998).

The Asian financial crash in mid-1997 and the resulting economic crisis created a local job-market squeeze. Millions of Thai citizens lost their jobs and new university graduates were unable to find work. The government, which had previously ignored the existence of unauthorized workers, cracked down on illegal entry and unlawful employment. On January 19, 1998, the Labor Ministry announced a plan to repatriate illegal immigrants, especially those from Burma, Laos, and Cambodia. The plan received strong support from local labor unions but drew angry protests from those businesses that relied heavily on the cheap labor of non-Thai workers ("Rights and wrongs of repatriation," *Bangkok Post*, March 1, 1998). In the face of domestic political pressure, the government nonetheless remained adamant, claiming that once the foreign workers were deported, unemployed Thai nationals would be able to fill the job vacancies. The Thai media played a significant role in setting the public agenda concerning this issue. When the public debate on illegal immigrants was most intense, two nationally circulated newspapers—*The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post*—ran extensive coverage of the government's deportation plan.

By integrating a social and a cultural theoretical approach, this paper attempts to demonstrate that the English-language Thai press produces news relying on stereotypes and story lines that resonate with cultural myths about Burmese and Indo-Chinese. These mostly pro-nationalist story lines are based on themes and plots that have appeared throughout much of Thailand's history since the 1930s, when the Thai military elite came to power.

This study primarily employs a qualitative textual analysis of news and feature coverage of migrant workers appearing in *The Nation* and the *Bangkok Post* between January 1997 and July 1998 – one year before and six months after the Thai government's official announcement to deport illegal migrant workers. This period is important because it covers the timeframe that clearly illustrates the press's attitude toward migrant workers soon after the onset of the Asian economic crisis until after the Thai government's official announcement of the deportation. By analyzing how a specific news frame was used by the Thai press, this paper attempts to outline the evolution of the news media's attitudes that in turn affected the manner in which the news was chronicled and meaning was made.

Conceptual frameworks

For the past half century, media scholars have attempted to answer two questions: "What is news?" and "Why does news appear as it does?" Different perspectives focus on various aspects of news and journalistic practices. Berkowitz suggests (1997) that there is no way that only one perspective can explain the entire nature of news and the process of news making; each perspective reveals a different aspect of the same picture.

The notion that "the world has to be *made to mean*" (Hall, 1982, p. 67) raises questions about the role of the media as a center for the process of meaning-making. Communication scholars firmly contend that communication media need to share a minimal quantum of mutual cultural and ideological values with their audience. Within a given political, economic, social, and cultural milieu, the media work to create and reinforce specific images of the world that surround both themselves and their audience (Hardt, 1992, p. 172).

Various approaches have addressed the question of why media coverage of news concerning subcultures, subordinated class groups, and foreign nationalities tends to be more negative than positive. Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922) provides a classic explanation of stereotypical and biased reporting in the media. Lippman believes that the media rely on certain stereotypes, based on their cultural and social values, to create a picture of the world to their audience. Meanwhile, the study of racism maintains that the media engage in "institutionalized racism" by being prejudiced toward different races by portraying them as social deviants (Dates & Barlow 1990; Entman 1990, 1992; Lule 1995; van Dijk 1996). The political economy perspective argues that the media are used as propaganda tools "to mobilize support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity" (Herman & Chomsky 1988, p. xi).

However, the social meaning of news frameworks can also be used to explain why the process of news production leads to a media bias against certain minorities, including women, homosexuals, and minorities. Since news production is constrained by such factors as the journalists' knowledge about topics, timing, sources, budget constraints, as well as institutional ideology (Fishman, 1980; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978), journalists tend to rely on certain patterns and themes to provide templates for new stories in order to accomplish their work within a limited time budget. Presenting news in the narrative form helps make the journalist's work easier, since they often must produce many stories within a limited time frame; their story-telling skills help them meet deadlines (Berkowitz, 1997; Colby & Peacock, 1973; Fishman, 1985; Tuchman, 1978; Vincent, Crow & Davis, 1989).

Social and cultural perspectives, or what Schudson calls a "culturological" framework are concerned with news as a human construct that evolves around the social and cultural worlds from which it emerges (1991). Zelizer (1993) explains this work of journalism as interpretive community. She posits that journalists create community through discourse that grows out of informal talks and professional gatherings. Through the discourse, "journalists create share interpretations that make their professional lives meaningful; that is, they use stories about the past to address dilemmas that present themselves while covering news" (Zelizer, 1993, p. 85).

Berkowitz explains that "when journalists typify an occurrence to expedite the reporting effort, they must decide on the general narrative structure that best applies" (1997, p. 321). The main components of the narrative are based on the traditional who, what, where, why, how, and when format (Vincent, Crow & Davis, 1989). Bennett & Edelman (1985) further note that popular plots require the identification of those who are "virtuous, who are threats to the good life, and which courses of action are effective solutions" (p. 159).

Bird & Dardenne (1988) state that journalists use a "cultural grammar" (Colby, 1975) to construct narratives which are based on cultures and values shared between journalists and their audiences. Galtung & Ruge (1965) explain that the "resonance" derived by the mythical elements of news refer to the notion that readers read—and journalists write—the same stories over and over again. Even though events occur differently, the principle of consonance makes sure that events are put into frameworks that are already understood and familiar (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The narrative incorporates the past into the present (White, 1987), with news patterns giving them a "skeleton on which to hang the flesh of the new story" (Bird & Dardenne, 1988, p. 73).

In our relations with different social and cultural groups, group ideology and collective identity need to be clearly defined by answering such questions as: "Who are we?," "Where do we come from?," "Who is included in our group?" and so on (van Dijk, 1998, p. 121). Rivenburgh (1997) states that relations among different cultural groups can arouse feelings of national identity in the evaluative and competitive senses. According to Tajfel & Turner (1986), discriminatory conduct may occur merely because people are aware of the existence of an "other." Research focusing on coverage of foreign news has revealed that the media not only carefully select issues and stories, but also position and evaluate them in relation to the perspective of their governments' policy (Hallin, 1984). "Once selected for coverage, nations are not simply described, but often positioned vis-à-vis the home nation in cooperative (friend, ally) oppositional (enemy, threat) or stratified (developing, admired) postures" (Rivenburgh 1997, p. 81). Other researchers find that the media tend to represent those with amiable/similar policies as "us," adversarial/different as "them" (Dahlgren with Chakrapani 1982; Stevenson & Gaddy 1994). Smith (1992) finds that historians often use symbolic representation of "self" and "others" as an instrument to "construct" or "invent" the sense of a nation, especially during periods of nationalism.

Journalism and historical narrative

Although there is a general assumption that news media in different cultures have different aims and emphases, Bird & Dardenne (1988) argue that writing news as a narrative is a skill learned and generally adopted by journalists to organize information more clearly and effectively. The journalist's use of the narrative as a means of shaping the social and cultural constructions of reality is also paralleled by the narrative methods that historians rely upon to construct a national history. Reynolds (1993) states that historians reconstruct the past by making stories out of chronicles, reducing the richness of history to a mere sequence of events. "Histories that are particularly successful at conveying an explanation of the past do so because they tell a story that fits a sequence of historical events like a hand in a glove" (Reynolds, 1993, p. 313).

White (1981) uses the term "emplotment" to describe the process of selecting a story-line to fit historical evidence, "essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making, operation" (White, 1985, p. 85). Gossman (1978) also notes that nationalist historians believe that the use of emplotment as fiction-making is "liberating." "It is a source of freedom, because it restores to human beings their role as makers of meaning" (Gossman, 1978, p. 33).

Bird & Dardenne (1988) assert that news is a particular kind of mythological narrative with its own symbolic codes that are easily recognized by the audience. "We know when we read or hear a news story, that we are in a particular 'narrative situation' (Barthes, 1982), that requires a particular kind of stance to be understood. News stories, like myths, do not 'tell it like it is,' but rather, 'tell it like it means'" (Bird & Dardenne, 1988, p. 71).

Myths, according to Hall (1984), must be constantly retold to be effective, with themes being rearticulated and reinterpreted over time. Stories, then, do not have to be recreated every time the need arises; instead, they are constantly derived from themes that already exist (Hall, 1984). Narratives are co-authored by those who tell stories and those who read them. Oschs (1998) states that how we think about ourselves and others is influenced by both the message content of jointly told narratives and the experience of working together to construct a coherent narrative.

Historical Myths in the Thai context

In his study of the Thai media and foreign policy, Lewis (1996) finds that the official Thai view of foreign policy usually stresses its historical success by emphasizing that Thailand is the only Southeast Asian nation never to have been colonized by the west. This view holds that even though Thailand was a "front line state" during the Vietnam War (according to the Domino Theory), it has managed to not only survive but to thrive in the world market economy. Many scholars also note that the Thai government has always closely linked its own national security—the preservation of national sovereignty and the promotion of national well-being—with that of its neighbors (Snitwongse & Paribatra, 1987; Neher, 1990; Buszynski, 1994; Lewis, 1996).

Varunpitikul & Tangwisutijit (1998) note that Thai officials often point out that even though they have been sharing the region with a myriad of races for centuries, they have little knowledge of their own neighbors. Hence, prejudice in foreign policy results from allowing myths and stereotypes to dominate the view regarding neighbor's traditions and cultures (Varunpitikul & Tangwisutiji, 1998).

Kasetsiri (1998) claims that the relationship between Thailand and its poorer neighbors is not based on mutual respect. In modern economic terms, Thais perceive their neighbors primarily as sources of cheap labor, natural resources, and markets for their products. In historical terms, Thais view Burmese and Vietnamese as threats. While the Burmese are thought of as national enemies because of the Burmese occupation of Thailand's Ayutthaya Kingdom (1569-1584 and 1767), the Vietnamese are seen as rivals in Thailand's effort to expand its territory into Laos and Cambodia. Thais also see Laotians and Cambodians as inferior. Between the middle of 1800s and the early 1900s, Thailand's expansionist military took control over some parts of Laos and Cambodia, and today, Thais generally believe that Laos and Cambodia are better off under Thai protection (Varunpitikul & Tangwisutiji, 1998).

Samudavanija (1991) states that the national identity of the Thai state was created in the late 1930s in an effort to legitimize the shift of power from a monarchy to military rule. Influenced by the rise of nationalist sentiment in Europe at the time, Thai military intellectuals construed a national history deliberately aimed at building a sense of national identity and unity (Reynolds, 1993). Despite the fact that the country has never been colonized by foreign powers, the historical narrative of the Thai state is built upon themes and plots of Thai leaders defending their homeland, warding off foreign aggression, expanding territories, and subjugating such "inferior" neighbors as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma (Tarling, 1998). The plot and meaning of the "melodramatic past," says Winichakul, became a dominant paradigm of Thai historical discourse, "making history an ideological weapon and a source of legitimation for the state" (1995, p. 100).

During the Cold War, the consensus in favor of maintaining unity in nation-states was at its height. After the 1950s, Burma, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had turned to Communism and were receiving massive military support from the Soviet Union or China. In response to the perceived threat outlined by the Domino Theory, the Thai military government instituted a policy of anti-Communist propaganda and repression. When anti-Communist sentiment was at its peak, the Thai national media were used by the government to spread rumors about their Communist neighbors' conspiracy against Thailand.

One story, for example, told of Vietnamese magic potions that reduced the size of penises and induced impotence in Thai men. The "penis-shrinking additives" were said to have been mixed in food sold in Vietnamese-owned restaurants in Thailand. National radio stations broadcast stories of blood-sucking vampires who kidnapped children in order to feed wounded communist guerrillas (Bowie, 1997) who were hiding themselves along the Thai-Laos-Cambodian borders. By describing these vampires as "wearing indigo-dyed shirts, flip-flops, shoulder bags and significantly, eyeglasses," the government-sponsored popular movement exacerbated xenophobia and anti-Communist sentiment that ultimately resulted in the massacre of students (who mostly dressed in the attire of the so-called vampires) at Thammasat University in October, 1976 (Bowie, 1997).

The legacy of its deliberately constructed political history may make it difficult for Thailand to maintain an indifferent attitude toward its neighbors, despite the fact that communism in Eastern Europe has collapsed and Thailand's formerly communist neighbors have embraced capitalist economic systems. According to the official Thai view, Thailand remains a "front-line" state, confronting perceived threats that come from political instability and economic poverty in neighboring countries such as Burma and Indo-China (Lewis, 1996).

Methodology

Altheide (1996) explains that the study of theme and frame is used in ethnographic textual analysis to capture the emphasis and meaning of news created by the media. Altheide states that frame, theme, and discourse are related to the communication format of selection, organization, and presentation of information (1996, p. 29). By recognizing the format, researchers are able to recognize frames that give a general definition of what is before us (Altheide, 1996).

Goffman (1974) believes that frame can be used as a schematic of interpretation that enables researchers to locate, perceive, identify, and label "occurrences of information." Further, the study of theme provides researchers with ideas that "connect different semantic elements of a story into a coherent whole" (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Lule also suggests that "though press portrayals are complex and subject to multiple interpretations, textual analysis can be valuable in pointing out how stereotypical depictions are invoked through the language and conventions of the press" (1995, p. 177).

In the examination of how the English-language Thai press frames news coverage of migrant workers, three questions are addressed:

1. What are the predominant themes that appear in the Thai press concerning migrant workers from Burma and Indo-Chinese countries?
2. Do these themes explain news narratives found in the Thai newspapers?
3. Do these themes reflect the common myths about foreign neighbors that are perpetuated in Thai history?

For a number of reasons, two English-language newspapers—the *Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*—were chosen for this research. First, the two newspapers provide daily on-line publications that can be easily accessed through the Internet. Second, the two newspapers are mostly read by the Thai elites and policy-makers even though their circulation of both newspapers is not large – approximately 50,000 for *The Nation*, and 60,000 for the *Bangkok Post* (Eng 1997). A total of 40 news articles and editorial commentaries that appeared one year before and six months after the Thai government's deportation plan was announced were examined to see how these two influential newspapers presented the picture of migrant workers during the economic crisis.

Findings

Migrant Workers: A Perceived Threat to National Security

Migrant workers are often depicted by the English-language Thai press as criminals, social deviants, job stealers, and diseased predators who pose a distinct threat to Thailand's national security. The Thai authorities are said to have their hands tied because of concerns regarding relations with other countries and human rights violations.

Evidently, the dominant image that Thais see of their neighbors through the media's lens is almost exclusively that of the threat that these neighbors pose to The national security and economic well-being of Thailand. In *The Nation* (April 14, 1997) a police chief stated that the presence of illegal immigrants in Thailand posed a threat to national security and had given rise to social problems because they were "part of criminal gangs and a major source of new diseases." According to the police chief, the police department was too short of funding to be able to crack down on the illegal entry of foreign laborers due to the increasing cost of detaining them. On May 28, 1997 *The Nation* echoed this negative theme by quoting an academician who warned that the huge number of Burmese immigrants posed a "big threat to Thailand's national security concerning crime, socio-politics, economics, health care, and foreign policy."

The *Bangkok Post* on July 13, 1997 presented a feature on the increasing flow of foreign workers seeking jobs in Thailand as being at the root of problems associated with "human smuggling" activities, narcotics and other illicit goods. This "has given the Thai government a headache," and any attempt to solve these problems would "become a continuing war," said the *Bangkok Post*. "Our major task now is smashing the gangs," reported the *Bangkok Post* in the same issue.

Both of these publications repeatedly presented stories in which all foreign workers from neighboring countries were depicted as being plagued with various diseases. For example, the *Bangkok Post* issue of December 9, 1996 discussed the practice of testing migrant workers for HIV. Under the same theme, *The Nation* (April 27, 1997) had a bold headline claiming: "Disease still rampant with influx of migrants." The story began with a lead paragraph that used an accusing tone regarding migrants bringing various diseases into Thailand, despite the Thai government's hard efforts to curb infectious disease such as AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, syphilis, elephantiasis, and leprosy.

According to the *Bangkok Post* (March 1, 1998), medical expenses for illegal immigrants were estimated to be as high as 100 million baht (roughly $US 3 million) a year. Further, migrant workers from poorer countries were said to have entered Thailand for the primary purpose of taking advantage of medical resources that are provided for Thai nationals. The reporter quoted a high-ranking public-health official: "Say we have 100 beds in a hospital, 60 beds might be taken up by Burmese immigrants. It is a dilemma because if we do not treat these people, they might spread new strains of diseases to Thais. But if we spend our resources on them, the locals will complain."

Foreign workers were also associated with increasing crime rates in cities with large numbers of migrant workers. On January 13, 1998, *The Nation* interviewed a metropolitan police chief concerning the increased rate of criminal activity resulting from the economic slump. The police chief was quoted as saying "This [illegal immigrants who commit crimes] is a very big problem for us alone to deal with.... There are many types of illegal immigrants. Some come to commit crimes directly in this country, and some use Thailand as a gateway to other countries. Nonetheless, they either directly or indirectly cause a rise in illegal activities. These criminals are often violent, as has been shown in cases involving business disagreements, killings, and the mutilation of the corpses...." The increase in criminal activities, according to the police chief, was indirectly caused by the fact that "immigrants take away jobs which would otherwise have gone to Thais, resulting in a rise in unemployment."

The *Bangkok Post*'s report on March 1, 1998 wrote that Thais had not been getting along well with illegal immigrants and saw them as "bad people" who instigated social unrest and street fights. Another article appearing in the *Bangkok Post* on March 1, 1998 raised concerns regarding the export of capital earned by foreign workers who repatriated a large portion of their salaries to the family that remained in their home country. "The outflow is huge," the *Bangkok Post* quoted a source in a commercial bank as saying. On August 23, 1997, *The Nation* reported on a call by the Employers' Association to lay off alien workers because it would "help heal the country's ailing economy." The same article also echoed a "suggestion that the government speedily launch a program to push out foreign workers."

Before the deportation plan was announced in early 1998, *The Nation* portrayed problems perceived to have been caused by foreign workers as being a permanent threat.

On May 5, 1997, the newspaper reported on a labor policy seminar in Thailand that criticized the Government's decision to grant permission to a number of foreign nationals to work in the country as a hasty and risky decision. According to the press, the government had not thoroughly investigated whether the country faced a serious labor shortage. In the same report, the government was said to have legalized foreign labor "merely to serve the interests of a small group of selfish employers who wanted to exploit illegal cheap workers to boost products from their labor-intensive, export-oriented industries." The uncontrolled number of foreign laborers, said *The Nation* on March 26, 1997, "could pose a threat to national security." That threat, repeated *The Nation* on April 4, 1997, was due to the influx of migrant workers that rose to "unmanageable levels." Therefore, the report stated, it might be impossible to solve the problems.

The Migrant Worker as Exploited Victim

In contrast to the primary theme of migrant workers who posed a threat to *The Nation*, a secondary theme in the Thai press depicts migrant workers as being victims or as being weak. On February 19, 1998, *The Nation* compared migrant workers to flies that could be "swatted" at any time by Thai authorities. "They are easily hidden or ignored when times are good," and, "easily disposed of when thing turns sour."

On March 1, 1998, the *Bangkok Post* ran an extensive feature questioning the "Rights and Wrongs of Repatriation." The story questioned the morality of the Thai government in deporting migrant workers to their home country. A "typical" illegal worker was portrayed as being "obedient," "hard working," and "reliable." According to the same report, most of these people, unprotected by Thai law, were abused by unscrupulous Thai businesses that paid wages lower than the legal minimum wage. "Those who [are] sick simply leave or die," said the *Bangkok Post*.

The Nation's editorial on April 8, 1998 echoed the same theme found in the *Bangkok Post*. The article told its readers that migrant workers were "victims to the worst kind of abuses—low pay, horrendous working conditions, unsanitary living quarters, seizure of their travel documents, sexual assault especially for those working as domestic helpers, and those duped into the sex industry. Some never make it home." Again, *The Nation* questioned the government's repatriation policy by arguing that these foreign workers were merely victims of the economic crisis in Southeast Asian countries. These "workhorses," said *The Nation*, "are made convenient scapegoats, rounded up and deported."

On June 1, 1998, the *Bangkok Post* quoted a labor expert who claimed that "Thai authorities [are] too critical of alien workers. They [are] regarded as criminals or separatists who wanted to destroy the country, rather than victims of the economic downturn." Also on July 31, 1998, the *Bangkok Post* pointed out that the Thai government's policy of repatriating migrant workers who had contracted HIV/AID was inhumane. The report quoted a non-governmental organization as saying "deporting a person living with HIV to a country where treatment doesn't exist means condemning that person to a death sentence."

In addition to being portrayed as victims of the Thai system, migrant workers were further depicted as being unwanted by their own country. On January 16, 1998, *The*

Nation cited an Army general who said "it is urgent they [migrant workers] be deported because they could pose short and long-term problems for us, particularly where security is concerned. Deport first and discuss later. Deportation is not an easy job, we could be criticized of not being aware of human rights." In the same article, a high-ranking National Security official expressed doubt about whether the country of origin of the migrant workers would take their own citizens back. The story implied that the unfortunate migrant workers were caught in a hopeless situation. Hence, the migrant workers could be better off under the Thai protection.

Discussions and implications

In the analysis of the press coverage of migrant workers, two dominant and conflicting themes emerge. While one evolves around stories of migrant workers being threats to national security, the other portrays them as victims of the Thai government's political expediency. The findings support the hypothesis that the Thai press uses certain patterns to report stories about foreign neighbors. Whether consciously or not, the press compresses the more complicated issues concerning illegal immigrant workers in Thailand by compiling them into two superficial and uncomplicated themes—threat versus victim.

These two themes, repeated over and over again throughout the studied period of more than one year, are drawn mainly from the Thai government's views of foreign neighbors and the mytho-historical relationship between Thailand and its neighbors. Evidently, the dominant news narratives thread along the "us" versus "them" theme. Since the stories are also reported in chronicle form, readers can easily recognize and assimilate the symbolic codes, mythic structures, themes, and plots that are used in the reports.

First, by framing the theme of "threat," the press fills in minor details such as the migrant workers' threat to public health, economic well-being, crime, and social disorder. All of these problems are linked to national security concerns and appear to justify the government's repatriation plan. The second picture of migrant workers is framed to show that migrant workers are weak, unfortunate, and helpless victims. In this case, the English-language Thai press, appeared to rely heavily on official sources, reflects historically patronizing Thai attitudes toward their foreign neighbors.

By following these two dominant themes, this author will argue that the English-language Thai newspapers generally ignore the more complicated socio-economic and political causes of labor migration, unequal development paces in Southeast Asia, as well as Thailand's domestic political conditions that are linked to migrant labor. Other humanistic elements concerning migrant workers are also overlooked. Not all migrant workers are "weak" and "obedient" victims, and it is also doubtful that they are the main cause for rising crime rates and social unrest in Thailand.

According to the sociological approach, the use of the news narrative by English-language Thai journalists can be learned by socializing within and among media organizations. Also, as stated previously, journalists tend to rely on certain patterns and themes as templates for new stories in order to accomplish their work within a limited time budget. By presenting news in the narrative form, the journalist is able to produce more stories in a shorter time-frame; their story-telling skills also help them meet deadlines. Indeed, the English-language Thai press's utilizing of the mythological narratives to make the meaning of news might be a subconscious one; perhaps with the need to "humanize" and "sensationalize" events to attract a larger readership. Yet, its reproduction of certain images of foreign nationals is problematic.

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Differential Employment Rates in the Journalism and Mass Communication Labor Force Based on Gender, Race and Ethnicity: Exploring the Impact of Affirmative Action

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Differential Employment Rates in the Journalism and Mass Communication Labor Force Based on Gender, Race and Ethnicity: Exploring the Impact of Affirmative Action

Abstract

This paper examines whether gender, race and ethnicity are associated with employment in the journalism and mass communication labor market and – if discrepancies in employment exist – what explanations might be offered for them. The data show strong evidence that race and ethnicity are associated with lower levels of employment among journalism and mass communication graduates. These discrepancies in success in the job market are not explainable by factors normally associated with hiring, such as type of training, type of institution offering the training, or qualifications such as internship experience and level of performance in the classroom.

Theoretically, anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action procedures have leveled the playing field in employment. Race, gender and ethnicity are supposed to no longer play a role in hiring, and, as a consequence, employment rates for the powerful and less powerful groups in society should be indistinguishable.

Because of the supposition that the race, gender and ethnicity no longer play a significant role in hiring, affirmative action–though not anti-discrimination legislation–has come under severe attack in recent years. Affirmative action is often termed a form of reverse discrimination that ought to be outlawed by the anti-discrimination legislation that preceded–and in many ways–spawned it.

Debates within the communication industries have mirrored those in society at large. Media industries are considering the need for continued affirmative action in a period of high employment overall and supposed equality of access to jobs in the economy.

Does discrimination continue to exist in the journalism and mass communication labor force? Is there evidence that anti-discrimination legislation and affirmative action policies on the part of media and related communication employment sectors have eliminated race, ethnicity and gender as criteria in hiring? This paper examines that question in detail by documenting, first, the rate of employment of those seeking entry-level jobs in the field of journalism and mass communication and then attempting to explain why discovered gaps in employment rates exist.

Differential Employment Rates in the Journalism and Mass Communication Labor Force Based on Gender, Race and Ethnicity: Exploring the Impact of Affirmative Action

Background

Until the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, it was legal to make hiring decisions based on race, ethnicity and sex. At that time, it was common to use these characteristics in selecting employees and in assigning them to work tasks once they were hired. Such decisions might have made short-term economic sense, given past practices and existing prejudices in the society. They certainly were accepted practice in U.S. industries, including those in the communication sector.

Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act made race and sex based segregation in the workplace illegal. Affirmative action resulted from the recognition that outlawing discrimination in hiring would not, of itself, result in equal access for women and members of racial or ethnic minorities to all segments of the labor force. Affirmative action requires employers to do more than refrain from making decisions based on race and ethnicity. It requires pro-active hiring activities to promote equal employment opportunities to groups traditionally discriminated against in employment. Reskin (1998, p. 6-7), in her review of the effects of affirmative action on employment, says:

> The passage in 1964 of a Federal law banning discrimination in employment curtailed the most blatant forms of discrimination but had little effect on the discrimination that stemmed from the ways that organizations went about recruiting, screening and evaluating workers. Custom, habit, self-interest and people's aversion to the risks that change entails all favor the status quo. In pursuing ostensibly neutral recruitment, hiring and promotion procedures that were customary before the passage of anti-discrimination regulations, establishments continued to exclude groups of workers from many lines of work. Eliminating such forms of habitual discrimination requires employers to actively modify their personnel practices. These modifications, designed to ensure race- and gender-neutral employment practices, are a fundamental part of affirmative action.

According to Reskin, four different types of affirmative action exist. The first type results from presidential and gubernatorial executive orders requiring action by government contractors and subcontractors and actually affects only a very small number of employers and employees. The second type is the consequence of regulations on government itself in its capacity as employer. The third type is based on court decisions in anti-discrimination cases. The final type stems from voluntary human resource policies of employers.

There is no doubt a link between the third and fourth types of affirmative action. The 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act amended Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to allow federal courts to include affirmative action among the remedies they can require of firms found guilty of discrimination and use affirmative action plans as part of a consent decree in settlement of such cases. Employers might well have initiated affirmation action programs voluntarily with the knowledge of the power of the courts to mandate such programs should a legal complaint be adjudicated.

Voluntary affirmative action programs have been found to have common characteristics (Vernon-Gerstenfeld and Burk, 1985). They promote the integration of jobs in organizations and racial and gender neutrality in decision-making. Advertisements that say the organization is an equal-opportunity employers are a common component. Some organizations train and reward managers for their affirmative action performance (Edelman, 1992; Badgett and Hartmann, 1995).

Estimates of the percentage of firms implementing voluntary affirmative action policies vary. Edelman (1992) found that 71 percent of the organizations surveyed nationally had affirmative action plans, almost one in five had an Equal Employment Opportunity or affirmative action office, and most had created structures and rules to foster affirmative action. Holzer and Neumark (1998), however, found that less than half of employers in Los Angeles, Atlanta, Boston, and Detroit said they took into account either equal employment opportunities or affirmative action in hiring workers. Miller (1994) found that only four in 10 of the large firms in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan area surveyed reported some form of affirmative action to recruit minorities, less than three in 10 did so to recruit women, about three in 10 employed affirmative action in promoting minorities, and one in four did so in promoting women. Fewer than half of workers have been found to believe their employer practices affirmative action (Davis and Smith, 1994).

The American Society of Newspaper Editors, the National Association of Broadcasters, the Newspaper Association of America, the Radio-Television News Directors Association and other professional mass communication groups have been outspoken in promoting affirmative action among their members. The Associated Press in the early 1980s settled a complaint by the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity and seven female, former AP employees requiring the news service to, among other things, develop an affirmative action policy for the organization (Fink, 1988). The Federal Communication Commission historically has required stations applying for license renewal to present an affirmative action plan for hiring and promotion of women and minorities (Sherman, 1987).

Despite these efforts at affirmative action and the existence of anti-discrimination laws, evidence of discrimination continues to exist in the U.S. This conclusion is based on evidence of differential employment outcomes, on reports of employers to researchers describing how race and sex affect their hiring decisions, and on the prevalence of organizational practices that have been shown to have discriminatory consequences (Reskin, 1998, p. 25). All show evidence that discrimination continues to be a prevalent part of American employment. This is true despite mounting evidence of potential effectiveness of affirmative action procedures (Bowen and Bok, 1998; Reskin, 1998).

Weaver and Wilhoit (1996) have found little evidence that American newsrooms have become much more diverse across time. Women made up 20% of the journalistic workforce in 1971, 34% in 1982-83, and 34% in 1992. Minorities increased from about 5% of the journalistic workforce in 1971 to 8.2% in 1992. American Society of Newspaper Editors (1999) has found that minorities make up less than 12% of the newsrooms of daily newspapers in the U.S.–roughly the same percentage as a year earlier and up from 8% in 1990 and 4% in 1978. Women made up 37% of the daily newsrooms in 1998–the first year that figure was tracked by the organization. In 1997, 27% of the U.S. population was minority; the figure is projected to increase a percentage point by 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988).

Differential Employment Rates in the Journalism and Mass Communication Labor Force Based on Gender, Race and Ethnicity: Exploring the Impact of Affirmative Action

Hiring and Job Seeking: A Literature Review

The recent literature on employment helps to explain why discrimination continues, despite legal prohibition of it. Much of this literature is a departure from the classic economic perspective on hiring, in which it is assumed that individuals looking for jobs, or managers looking for employees, are rational actors and follow the dictates of labor market theory. Employers are the buyers of labor, and employees are the sellers. Supply and demand operate to regulate wages and establish equilibrium, and within a strict interpretation of this view, unemployment should not exist (Granovetter 1995). It is also assumed that individuals can possess complete information about the "market" (Stigler 1961).

Granovetter (1995) however, has resituated the concept of job search from the rational actor approach of economics to the realm of sociology. Job-finding behavior, he says, "is heavily embedded in other social processes that closely constrain and determine its course and results" (39). Granovetter begins with the idea that information is imperfectly distributed in the job-search process. Many top-level jobs are filled by those privy to special information, and he found that 57 percent of jobs are filled through informal contacts and non-rational avenues. In similar studies other researchers have found percentages ranging from the 30s to the 50s (Hanson and Pratt, 1987; Campbell and Rosenfeld, 1985).

According to Granovetter, individuals are most likely to receive *new* job information from those with whom they have "weak ties." They are less likely to receive new information from those with whom they have strong ties (family and close friends) because they are likely to already have this information. Common examples of weak ties include friends and family of former co-workers and schoolmates, and contacts made from networking at professional conferences. Weak ties are occupational rather than social, and those who have fewer ties tend to have more trouble in the job market. Historically, blacks have been at a disadvantage because they have been underrepresented in the occupational structure itself and therefore have been less privy to informal channels of opportunity.

Formality of search is also a major dimension in the literature on hiring theory. According to Marsden and Campbell (1990), informal recruitment (e.g., employees recruiting acquaintances) facilitates the hiring of persons who are already well informed about a workplace. For this reason, informal recruitment can lower turnover, but it may also lead to a lack of diversity in the applicant pool, because those associated with the firm are likely to convey information to socially similar persons. Finlay and Coverdill (1998), in a study of headhunters and white-collar recruitment, found that the assessment of a job candidate's likely social fit is a highly important factor in the hiring of white-collar employees. In short, "like hires like" (p. 123).

According to Marsden (1996), formal channels of recruitment--including advertising in the mass media, visiting campuses and using placement agencies--are more suitable for reaching geographically dispersed and more demographically diverse candidates. Also, larger organizations are more likely to use formal channels of recruitment because they have more resources for formal searches and their needs may exceed the skill resources of the local community. Barron and Bishop (1985) found that economic conditions may also have an effect on the level of formality and on how intensive the search is. When faced with a smaller applicant pool, employers tend to screen potential hires less carefully.

Pfeffer and Cohen (1984) found the existence of internal labor markets in organizations to be an indicator of formalized recruitment methods. At organizations with internal labor markets, i.e. formal promotion ladders with few ports of entry at the bottom, employees are expected to stay with the organization for a lifetime and management therefore has a higher stake in their quality. Similarly, Barron and Bishop (1985) found that organizations use more intensive formal methods of recruiting when it is necessary for the organization to invest more training in the position.

Little systematic work has been done focusing on hiring and its effects of the journalism and mass communication labor market. Becker, Fruit and Caudill (1987) did study how media organizations make hiring decisions, but they did not examine how those decisions were affected by gender and race or ethnicity. Becker, Kosicki, Engleman and Viswanath (1994) examined the individual predictors of success in the journalism and mass communication labor market, though the analysis dealt only tangentially with gender and race. Neither variable predicted success of the applicants in finding a job in the field. Claussen, Lowrey, Anderson and Becker (1999) found evidence that newspapers, at least, do not have elaborate internal labor markets--that is, policy that leads to clear paths of internal advancement--and rely heavily on external markets of the type most likely to be influenced by informal hiring methods.

Research in the sociology of organizations has found that a strong external or "craft" labor market is an indicator of more informal recruitment channels. In a craft market, skills are transferrable between organizations and job openings are often communicated informally between occupational members. News organizations have been viewed as existing in an external "craft" labor market (Baron, et al, 1986).

Hypotheses

Two different types of literature have been reviewed to this point. The first is macro-level, looking at social policy and its outcome in producing a labor force that is not differentiated by race or sex. The second is organizational, looking at factors that come into place as employers make decisions on whom to hire and whom to promote. The social policy can dictate organizational behavior, and only if the organizational behavior is consistent with social policy will the outcome of employment undifferentiated by race and gender be possible. At least that is the assumption of the social policy.

Unknown in the field of journalism and mass communication is the extent to which social policy of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination has led to employment patterns that are not differentiated by race and gender. The evidence at hand has focused only on segments of the industry and only on the cumulative effects of hiring, not on the immediate hiring decisions themselves.

If the social policy of affirmative action and the laws of anti-discrimination have been effective, there should be no difference in employment rates for women and men, or for minorities and those not labeled as minorities. If the policy has failed in the field of journalism and mass communication--as seems likely given the evidence of its failure in the labor force generally--women and men should show differential employment rates, as should minorities and nonminorities. We hypothesize this second outcome.

Hypothesis 1: Across time, differential employment rates of women and men and of minorities and nonminorities in the field of journalism and mass communication will continue to exist.

We are not expecting blatant discrimination to continue to play a significant role. The law has made it difficult for employers to refuse to hire qualified applicants or to openly follow policies that make it impossible for women or minorities to gain jobs. Gender, race and ethnicity, however, are often linked to other characteristics that play a role in the hiring decision. Minorities are less likely to have had the same educational experiences, the same opportunities, and the same guidance as their colleagues. The same can be said for women in comparison with men. The result should be that much of the evidence of discrimination should be attributable to the legacy of inequality. What isn't attributable to these should result from what we have termed the informal hiring practices of media organizations--the practices that can be addressed by renewed efforts at affirmative action. As noted above, the informal hiring procedures often used make it likely that people will hire people like themselves--and those making hiring decisions are not often female or nonwhite. We hypothesize that not all of the variance in employment rates will be explainable by the legacy of inequality of experience. We speculate that such a finding will provide evidence of the effects of informal hiring practices.

Hypothesis 2: Even after controlling for the inequality of experiences of women and men and of minorities and nonminorities, gaps in employment between women and men and between minorities and nonminorities continue to exist.

Methods

Data gathered as part of the *Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates* are appropriate for a test of these hypotheses. The *Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates* is designed to monitor the employment rates of graduates of journalism and mass communication programs in the United States, including Puerto Rico. In addition, the survey tracks the curricular activities of those graduates while in college. The survey has employed a comparable methodology since 1987. During that time, more than 24,200 graduates of journalism and mass communication programs around the country participated in the survey.

At present, the *Annual Survey of Journalism & Mass Communication Graduates* is conducted at the Henry W. Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. From 1987-1996, the survey was conducted at The Ohio State University.

As a first step in the survey, a sample of schools is drawn from those listed in the *Journalism and Mass Communication Directory*, published annually by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and *The Journalist's Road to Success: A Career and Scholarship Guide*, published each year by the Dow Jones Newspaper Fund, Inc. The sample of schools is modified each year to reflect changes in these two directories. Sample selection is probabilistic, so that schools selected represent the population of schools listed in the two directories. In 1997, as an example, 92 schools were drawn from the 451 unique entries of four-year programs in the U.S. (including Puerto Rico) in the two directories.

Administrators at the selected schools are asked to provide the names and addresses of their spring bachelor's and master's degree recipients. As the second step in the survey, a questionnaire is mailed in November or December to all spring graduates receiving either a bachelor's or a master's degree from the selected programs. A second questionnaire is sent to nonrespondents in January or February.

The questionnaire asks about the respondent's experiences both while as a student and in the months since graduation. Included are questions about university experiences, job-seeking and employment, and salary and benefits.

Employment rates for each of the survey years are based on responses to a question on employment at the time of completion of the interview. Respondents could indicate if they were employed full-time, part-time, enrolled in school, or unemployed. Respondents enrolled in school were eliminated from computation of employment rates.

Respondents classified themselves according to sex and race/ethnicity, allowing for computation of employment rates by these social strata.

Additionally, respondents indicated if they had sought jobs in the field of journalism and mass communication and if they had received job offers in the field. For those who sought such a job, receiving an offer is an indicant of job-seeking success, whether or not the job was actually taken.

Respondents indicate the type of specialization within journalism and mass communication they completed, the number of internships they completed, in which campus media they participated, and their grade point average.

Respondents were classified as having attended an accredited journalism program or not and, based on the percentage of students applying to their college and university who were admitted, as having attended a selective university or not.

Return rate for the 1997 survey, computed as the number returned divided by the number mailed minus the bad addresses, was 54.5%. Of the usable questionnaires, 2,169 were from bachelor's degree recipients and 145 were from those who received a master's degree. Earlier surveys produced similar return rate statistics.

Findings

Most graduates of journalism and mass communication programs receive an undergraduate, rather than graduate degree, and the graduate survey reflects this fact. The design of the survey was changed in 1989 only to incorporate master's degree recipients. The analyses that follow are based only on the responses of bachelor's degree recipients from 1987-1997, two-thirds of whom were female and 15 percent of whom were classified as minorities – that is, African American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian American, Pacific Islander American, or Other.

Tables 1 and 2 show the employment rates for bachelor's degree recipients who did not return to school in the year following the completion of their undergraduate programs. Table 1 reports the rates separately for women and men. Table 2 reports the employment rates for Minorities and Nonminorities.

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In general, there are only small differences between women and men in terms of level of full-time employment six to eight months after graduation from a journalism and mass communication program. The figures were nearly identical in 1987, and they vary only slightly in the years that follow. Across all years, the difference in full-time employment rates is 2.7%–a difference that is statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square=26.28, df=2, p<.001). The difference is in favor of women. Women have a slightly better chance of being employed full-time six to eight months after graduation than do men, who are slightly more likely to end up in part-time positions.

The discrepancies between minorities and nonminorities, however, is more striking. In every year except one since 1987, minorities report lower levels of full-time employment six to eight months after graduation than do nonminorities. The exception is 1988, when the number of minorities surveyed was quite small, and, as a consequence, the power of the estimation low. To be sure, in two years, 1991 and 1992, the differences in level of full-time employment was slight. Across all years, however, the gap in level of full-time employment six to eight months after graduation was 5.2 percentage points, with minorities significantly less likely to report full-time employment than were nonminorities (Pearson dsf-Square=41.19, df=2, p<.001).

Figures 1 and 2 summarize the data in these two charts. What is most strikingly from them are the trend lines for minority and nonminority employment. These lines suggest that the gap–already at 10.2 percentage points in 1997 — is likely to get larger, if the past is a predictor. While levels of full-time employment have increased for both minority and nonminority graduates in the years since the recession of the early 1990s, the improvement appears to be greater for nonminority graduates. There has been no faltering in this trend line, and the slope is steeper.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a continuation of discrepancies in the labor market–as reflected in employment rates--for women versus men and for minorities versus nonminorities. Evidence of discrepancies for women are slight and suggest that women have fared just slightly better than men. The discrepancies are more striking when minority graduates are compared with nonminority graduates.

This discrepancy is growing, which is consistent with the hypothesis of continued inequalities, based on race and ethnicity, in the labor market.

The employment rates are macro-level indicators of potential discrimination in the labor market. A better indicator of bias in hiring, however, comes from an analysis of any discrepancy between job seeking and the receipt of a job offer. The graduate survey asked respondents to indicate from which types of mass communication employers they sought jobs and from which ones they received offers. These survey questions test hiring discrimination at the individual level and are therefore appropriate for use in a test of Hypothesis 2.

Table 3 reports the results of a regression analysis in which the receipt of a job offer is the dependent variable. Only those graduates who actually sought work with a communication employer are included. The dependent variable is scored as dichotomous, with receipt of an offer coded as 1 and no receipt coded as 0. Ordinary least squares regression was used, though logistic regressions were also run, with nearly identical results.

Independent variables used in the analysis were minority status (minority scored high), reported college grade point average, accreditation status of the program at which the graduate studied, selectivity of that program, sequence specialization (with dummy variables for journalism, RTV and Public Relations), number of internships worked by student applicants, number of college media for which the student worked, and gender (female scored high).

Table 3 shows the results of these regression analyses only back through 1990, because similar measures of all of the key variables were not available in earlier years. In each year, the variables entered into the equation explained a significant amount of variance in the receipt of at least one job offer. The R square ranges from a low of .031 to a high of .080.

Consistent with the findings from the analysis of employment rates, gender contributes little to an understanding of the dependent variable, receiving a job offer. Only in 1996 does gender explain a significant amount of variance. In each year, the partial correlation is positive.

Race/ethnicity, however, is a different matter. Being a member of a minority is negatively associated with receipt of a job offer in six of the eight years analyzed in Table 3, and in four of those years the partial correlation is statistically significant. What is striking is that these are the four most recent years. Minority status appears to be becoming increasingly important in understanding hiring and increasingly negative in its contribution to the hiring outcome.

Other variables that explain a significant amount of variance are grade point average, accreditation status, number of internships received and number of campus media in which the student participated. Having a newspaper major also is a significant predictor. None of these are consistent across all years. What is consistent is that gender matters little, as does, controlling for other factors, the selectivity of the university.

Table 4 reports the findings of a regression analysis intended to examine in more detail the contribution of race and ethnicity to the hiring decision. In this analysis, race/ethnicity is scored as a dummy variable, with African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American status entered into the equation. The analysis shows that being Black in every year is negatively associated with getting a job offer in the field of journalism and mass communication–among those who sought such a job. In recent years, being Hispanic also produces negative outcomes. Being an Asian-American is not associated with receipt of a job offer.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that minority status would continue to be a significant factor in hiring, even after variables that are socially linked with minority status were controlled. Tables 3 and 4 provide strong evidence in support of the hypothesis.

Conclusions

This paper has two related goals. The first is an assessment of social policy–or of the effects of social policy. The second is the development of social and organizational theory. Its origins lie in the recent debate about the need for the continuation of affirmative action policy in the United States as a means of addressing social inequalities in the labor market. The paper attempts to inform that debate through an understanding of the labor market and of how organizations actually make decisions that have impact on that labor market.

A case might be made for discontinuing affirmative action policies in hiring in the field of journalism and mass communication if there were no evidence of continued inequalities in the labor market attributable to the social classifications of gender and race/ethnicity. The data presented here indicate that isn't the case. While women have fared well in recent years, allowing them to make at least slight gains that will help offset–but clearly not overcome--biases from the past, minorities have not done well. Being a minority is associated with lower levels of employment, and the situation seems to be getting worse. The evidence argues convincingly that policies that are designed to offset biases in the labor market have not yet been effective. A strengthening of those policies–rather than a weakening of them–seems to be in order.

We speculate that these biases in the labor market are attributable to what we have termed informal hiring methods, that is, methods not based on strict rules but rather stemming from social contacts and interaction. To the extent these informal methods prevail, affirmative action seems to be even more important.

In fact, while traditional qualifications of job seekers–grade point average, specialization, number of internships, college media experience, accreditation status of the program–all predict to job success, they do not explain away the variance associated with minority status. In other words, even though minority status may be associated with some of these variables, it remains a significant predictor of the lack of success in the job market when these other factors are controlled for.

While we expect that the culprit here is informal hiring methods of the sort that can be addressed by affirmative action, we cannot rule out blatant racism as an explanation. The use of race per se in hiring, of course, is illegal, and it is much more likely that informal hiring procedures–perhaps even motivated by racism–is the explanation. We also cannot rule out the possibility that different job-seeking behaviors on the part of minority graduates that cut across settings play a role. Granovetter's (1995) research on the social situation of job seeking in facts argues this to be the case. Minority graduates may employ less effective job-searching strategies, such as looking only in large, urban settings or only with certain types of institutions. None of the measured variables, however, suggest these differences in job seeking behaviors between minority and nonminority graduates.

Employers in media organizations should be aware that, if informal hiring procedures lead to a less diverse staff, this may in turn lead to less diversity in the content generated and processed by this staff. While news content may be constrained by organizational routines, the organization's culture and the individuals in the organizations play a role as well.

The policy implications of the paper seem clear enough. Increased attention to the development of hiring procedures that are designed to provide fair access to the labor market is needed. The theoretical implications also seem clear. This study suggests that informal hiring procedures may play an important role in the journalism and mass communication labor market. A more formal test of this relationship in which direct measures of informal hiring procedures are employed is now needed.

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CHART 1

Employment rates by gender

Employment rates for BA recipients not returning to school

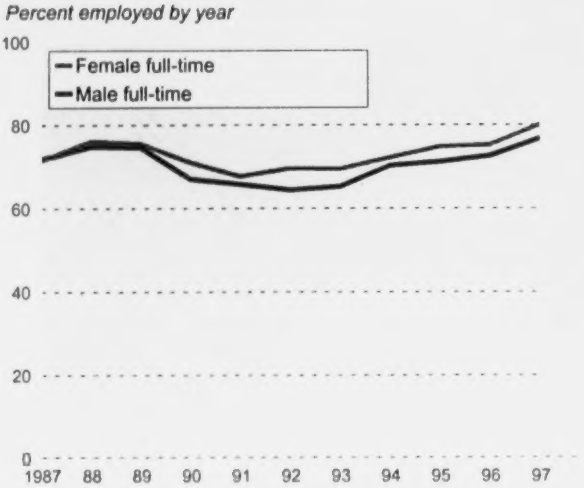

CHART 2

Employment rates by race

Employment rates for BA recipients not returning to school

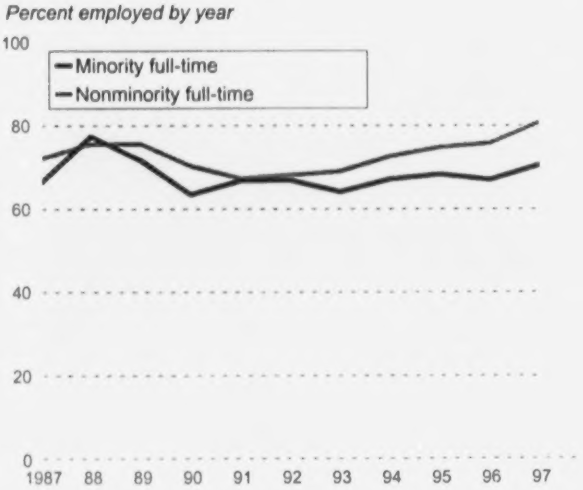

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TABLE 1

Employment rates by gender

Percentages

	FEMALE				MALE			
Year	**Full-time**	**Part-time**	**Unemployed**	**N**	**Full-time**	**Part-time**	**Unemployed**	**N**
87	71.7	12.7	15.7	741	71.8	14.7	13.4	380
88	76.1	11	12.9	356	74.9	11.5	13.6	191
89	75.5	10.4	14.1	1,389	74.7	10.9	14.4	663
90	71	12.1	16.9	1,495	67	12.8	20.2	757
91	67.7	14.3	18	1,560	65.8	17.7	16.5	690
92	69.6	14.2	16.2	1,643	64.4	18.5	17.1	801
93	69.5	13.4	17.2	1,480	65.2	17.2	17.6	693
94	72.2	12.9	14.9	1,364	70.2	13.8	16	682
95	74.8	10.2	15	1,371	71.2	15.4	13.4	740
96	75.1	10	14.9	1,372	72.7	11.6	15.7	688
97	80.1	8.1	11.8	1,321	76.8	10.2	13	686
Total	72.6	11.9	15.5	14,101	69.9	14.3	15.8	6,960

TABLE 2

Employment rates by race/ethnicity

Percentages

	MINORITY				NONMINORITY			
Year	**Full Time**	**Part Time**	**Unempl.**	**N**	**Full Time**	**Part Time**	**Unempl.**	**N**
87	66.4	15	18.7	107	72.2	13.2	14.6	1,013
88	77.4	7.5	15.1	53	75.6	11.5	12.9	488
89	71.6	13.7	14.7	107	75.6	10.2	14.2	1,840
90	63.4	16	20.6	287	70.3	11.9	17.8	1,953
91	66.8	12.9	20.3	286	67.3	15.6	17.1	1,966
92	66.9	14.9	18.2	329	68.1	15.8	16.2	2,107
93	64.1	14.5	21.4	345	69	14.5	16.5	1,831
94	67.1	14.3	18.7	343	72.6	12.9	14.5	1,678
95	68.1	12.5	19.3	367	74.8	12	13.2	1,722
96	67	10.4	22.5	355	75.7	10.6	13.7	1,689
97	70.5	13.4	16.1	329	80.7	8	11.3	1,657
Total	67.3	13.5	19.2	2,998	72.5	12.5	15	17,943

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TABLE 3

Regression of job offer on predictors

Year	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97
N	1,538	1,574	1,653	1,504	1,401	1,525	1,515	1,500
% Offered Job	63	57	57	60	64	67	72	76
R Square	**0.043**	**0.039**	**0.058**	**0.031**	**0.066**	**0.043**	**0.08**	**0.064**
adj R Square	0.037	0.033	0.052	0.025	0.059	0.037	0.074	0.058
Partial correlations:								
Gender (2=female)	0.01	0	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.04	**0.06**	0.02
Minority Status	-0.03	0	0	-0.03	**-0.07**	**-0.05**	**-0.06**	**-0.09**
GPA	0.05	0.02	**0.1**	**0.07**	0.04	**0.09**	**0.1**	**0.07**
Accreditation	0.04	**0.07**	**0.07**	0.03	**0.08**	0.04	**0.08**	**0.05**
Selectivity	0.01	0.01	0.01	**0.06**	0.03	0.01	0.04	0
Sequence: Newspaper	**0.11**	**0.08**	**0.13**	0.04	**0.11**	**0.07**	**0.09**	**0.09**
Sequence: RTV	0.01	-0.03	0	-0.01	0.05	**0.07**	0.01	0.02
Sequence: PR	**0.06**	**0.05**	**0.07**	0.02	**0.08**	0.04	**0.06**	**0.1**
Number of Internships	**0.12**	**0.12**	**0.08**	0.04	**0.13**	**0.12**	**0.15**	**0.13**
Number of Campus Media	**0.07**	0.03	**0.06**	**0.07**	**0.07**	0.04	0.04	**0.08**

BOLD = significance at the .05 level.

TABLE 4

Regression of job offer on dummy variables

Year	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97
R Square	**0.05**	**0.044**	**0.063**	**0.033**	**0.07**	**0.046**	**0.08**	**0.063**
adj R Square	0.043	0.037	0.056	0.026	0.062	0.038	0.072	0.053
Partial correlations:								
Black	**-0.09**	**-0.05**	-0.02	-0.04	**-0.09**	-0.03	-0.05	**-0.06**
Hispanic	0.02	0.03	**0.07**	-0.02	0.02	**-0.07**	-0.02	**-0.06**
Asian-American	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.03	-0.02	0	0.02	0.02
GPA	0.04	0.01	**0.1**	**0.07**	0.04	**0.09**	**0.1**	**0.07**
Accreditation	0.04	**0.08**	**0.07**	0.02	**0.08**	0.04	**0.08**	**0.05**
Selectivity	-0.01	0.01	0	**0.06**	0.03	0.01	0.04	0
Sequence: Newspaper	**0.11**	**0.08**	**0.13**	0.04	**0.11**	**0.07**	**0.09**	**0.09**
Sequence: RTV	0.01	-0.03	0	-0.01	0.05	0.07	0.01	0.02
Sequence: PR	**0.06**	**0.05**	**0.07**	0.02	**0.08**	0.04	**0.06**	**0.1**
Number of Internships	**0.12**	**0.13**	**0.08**	0.05	**0.14**	**0.11**	**0.15**	**0.13**
Number of Campus Media	**0.07**	0.04	**0.06**	**0.07**	**0.08**	0.04	0.05	**0.08**
Gender (2=female)	0.02	0	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.03	**0.06**	0.02
N	1,538	1,574	1,653	1,504	1,401	1,525	1,515	1,500

BOLD = significance at the .05 level.

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Running Head: CHILDREN'S WEB SITES

Is the Web Sexist?

A Content Analysis of Children's Web Sites

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Is the Web Sexist?

A Content Analysis of Children's Web Sites

Abstract

A sample of twenty children's Web sites (n=200 pages) was analyzed at the site, page, and character levels for sex role stereotypes. The characters (n=164) were 51% male. Results showed discrepancies between male and female characters for age, occupational portrayals, dress, and physical attractiveness. However, no gender differences were found for the types of activities characters engaged in (e.g., passive, active) or for the settings in which they were portrayed (e.g., home, outdoors).

Is the Web Sexist?

A Content Analysis of Children's Web Sites

Media portrayals of men and women have been a common subject of analysis in both television and magazine research. This literature documents a pervasive pattern of sex role stereotyping in both media content and advertising (e.g., Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Ferrante, Haynes, & Kingsley, 1988; Lin, 1997, 1998). A primary concern generated by this research is the perpetuation of submissive, two-dimensional, and sexualized images of women. Moreover, these themes also emerge when examining children's media (e.g., Barcus, 1983; Smith, 1994), which implies that audiences are socialized to sex role stereotypes at a young age.

The present study extends this line of inquiry to a relatively new medium, the World Wide Web. The Web audience is expanding rapidly: Between 1996 and 1998, it nearly doubled in size, from 23% to 41% of all Americans (Pew Research Center, 1998). Yet, despite the fact that nearly half of the U.S. population is online, systematic efforts to analyze the Web's content have been sparse (e.g., Ha & James, 1998), and none have dealt with gender portrayals. Thus, the purpose of this research is to content analyze children's Web sites for sex role stereotypic images and language.

Children seem particularly susceptible to the Web's appeal: In the United States, an estimated 16 million children under age 18 have online access in the home (Silver & Perry, 1999), and this figure would be even larger if those children who have access at school were added. Sites targeted to young "surfers" (e.g., Barbie, The Walt Disney Company, Nintendo) are among the most popular Web destinations (Web 21, 1999). Further, research indicates that children are socialized at a young age to sex role stereotypes (Basow, 1980), and the media serve as a primary agent of socialization. Thus, an analysis of these sites is justified in order to evaluate the themes and images to which children are exposed.

As a medium that combines the technical characteristics of traditional media—text, graphics, sound, animation, and video—the Web has the potential to imitate sex role stereotypic conventions from all existing media. Although the numbers of male and female users are now leveling (Pew Research Center, 1998), the Web is still a "gendered technology"—created and customized by males (Miller, 1995)—which gives us reason to suspect that the Web perpetuates the sex role stereotypes found in traditional media. However, much has been said about the Web as a neutral meeting ground (e.g., Ebo, 1998; Turkle, 1997); that is, users have great flexibility in how they define or represent themselves online, since social cues are filtered out. While this point is usually raised in the context of computer mediated communication (e.g., chatrooms, Multi User Dungeons), it is possible that the concept of the "neutral meeting ground" is an ethos which is found in all of Web content.

Given these contrasting arguments for the degree of sex role stereotypic content on the Web, it is the aim of this study to provide a preliminary examination of this issue using popular children's Web sites. We will begin by discussing the concept of sex role stereotypes and reviewing relevant literature regarding such stereotypes in the media. Then, the study's results will be discussed and compared with previous media research to investigate how the degree of sexist themes in children's Web sites differs from that found in traditional media.

Basow (1980) defines sex role stereotypes as "the rigidly held and oversimplified beliefs that males and females, by virtue of their sex, possess distinct psychological traits and characteristics" (pp. 4-5). These beliefs lead us to consider certain attributes, behaviors, and aptitudes as exclusively masculine or feminine. For example, in American society, personality traits such as dominance and aggression tend to be associated with men, whereas submission and sensitivity are associated with women (Bem, 1981). However, these traits are not innately masculine or feminine; rather, society defines them this way. Serious implications of acquiring sex role stereotypes arise when people define themselves or others according to these stereotypes. Thus, their beliefs about their own or others' capabilities are limited by their rigid definitions of gender.

Prior research indicates that entertainment media and advertising are filled with sex role stereotypic themes and images. Certain patterns emerge from this literature, including discrepancies between male and female portrayals of physical characteristics (e.g., attractiveness, age, degree of body revealment, etc.), behavioral characteristics (e.g., physically aggressive, active, inactive, etc.), and personality characteristics (e.g., dominance, subordinance, etc.). Here, we will draw on relevant research from each of these areas to shape our analysis of children's Web sites.

Physical characteristics. Content analyses of magazine advertisements have documented a trend over time toward showing increasingly sexually provocative and explicit images of women. Soley and Kurzbard (1986) found an increase in the number of female models in various stages of nudity in print ads between 1964 and 1984. Similarly, in a content analysis comparing 1979 and 1991 ads from three women's magazines (Vogue, Mademoiselle, and McCall's), Kang (1997) found that the 1991 ads depicted significantly more female models either wearing body-revealing clothes or in various stages of nudity (32% vs. 25%).

Lin (1997, 1998) examined the sex role stereotypic portrayals of men and women in prime time television commercials aired on ABC, CBS, and NBC during the spring of 1993. She found that women were more likely to be portrayed as "alluring" (i.e., physical appearance was used to generate product appeal), whereas men were more likely to be portrayed as "nonalluring" (i.e., the model's physical appearance was not used to create product appeal). Further, "alluring" models were more likely to be portrayed as two-dimensional, nonthinking characters as compared with their nonalluring counterparts.

In a second analysis, Lin (1998) found that female models were more likely to be fit (i.e., slender) whereas male models were more likely to be muscular. Female models also were more likely to be in a state of undress, while male models were more likely to be fully clothed. In terms of appearance, female models were more often physically attractive, portrayed as sex objects (i.e., their primary function was to be sexually enticing), and considered sexy than were the male models.

Another study (Hall & Crum, 1994) examined male and female portrayals in 59 beer commercials that were aired during sporting events on ABC, CBS, and NBC during 1991 and 1992. They found that both male and female models most commonly appeared in leisure attire (i.e., casual clothing associated with recreational activities), followed by swimwear (for females) and blue collar clothing (for males). Hall and Crum also analyzed camera shots focusing on the models' chests, buttocks, legs, and crotches.

Chest shots were most frequent for both male and female models, although women's chests were shown twice as often as men's. Camera shots of the models' buttocks, legs, and crotches were less frequent; while there were no male crotch shots, female crotch shots were present in five ads. Of the commercials containing at least one camera shot of a body part, there were significantly more female than male body parts displayed.

These analyses document the media's focus on women's appearance. Compared with their male counterparts, women's physical attractiveness, shape, and body are much more likely to be emphasized. Studies that have focused specifically on children's television have extended this literature by quantifying the discrepancies between the behavioral and personality characteristics associated with males and females.

Behavioral and personality characteristics. Analyses of children's programming show that male characters are more often dominant and aggressive. For example, Barcus (1983) found that 29% of male characters in children's entertainment television programming were highly aggressive, as compared with 16% of female characters. Moreover, males used violence three times as often as females. Barcus also looked at characters' motivations, finding that while 8% of the males were motivated by hatred, revenge, or destruction, no females were, and that 9% of females had marriage, family, or parental duty motivations as compared with 3% of males.

Mayes and Valentine (1979) used a unique approach to analyze characters in cartoon shows: They had children between the ages of 8 and 13 rate the characters on various personality attributes. The children found the male characters to be aggressive, brave, dominant, and unconcerned about appearance, while female characters scored on the opposite ends of these traits.

Similar themes emerge in prime time programming. In an analysis of child characters, Pierce (1989) found that boy actors were considered active, aggressive, rational, and unhappy, while again, girl actors were ranked at the opposite pole on each of these traits. Girls engaged in activities such as dressing up, talking on the phone, playing with dolls, and helping in the kitchen, while boys played sports, ran around the house, or got into mischief.

Finally, Smith (1994) analyzed the advertisements in one week of children's programming aired on four television networks, ABC, Fox, CBS, and Nickelodeon during 1991. She focused on "gender-positioned" ads, defined as "those that included characters (either real or animated) of only one sex" (p. 330). Out of a total of 218 advertisements, 38% were gender-positioned. More than two-thirds of these ads were positioned for boys (67%). She also looked at the activities the characters were engaged in, finding that male characters performed more physical activities than did girls, and that only boys were engaged in antisocial behaviors. Also, girls were more often portrayed in home settings, while boys were more often in out-of-home settings.

Thus, in both children's television programming and advertising, viewers cannot escape the sex role stereotypic portrayals of male and female characters. Is the Web audience subject to a similar type of sexist environment? This study investigates this issue by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What degree of sex role stereotyping, in terms of physical and behavioral characteristics, is present in children's Web sites?

RQ2: How does the degree of sex role stereotyping in children's Web sites compare with that found in television programming?

Methods

The sample was drawn from Web 21's Hot 100 list[1] from the first week of November, 1998, and consisted of the top twenty Web sites from Web 21's list of the 100 most frequently visited children's sites. The sites were: The Walt Disney Company, Discovery Channel, DC Comics, Warner Brothers' Kids, Barbie, Lego, Toys R Us, Sega, Freezone, Dark Horse Comics, Otaku, Nickelodeon, PBS, Nintendo, McDonalds, Bonus, Planetzoom, United Media, Smithsonian, and Safe Surf. For each site, the home page and nine additional pages (randomly selected from page links) were coded.[2]

Variables were coded at the site level, the page level, and the individual character level. At the site level, the type of site was coded; categories included media (site represents a media corporation; for example, broadcast or cable television, newspaper, movies, and comics), toys (including action figures, dolls, and video games), education, or other. At the page level, the variables included background and text colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, white, gray, black, and other), and the number of gender-neutral, masculine, and feminine pronouns in the text.

The most detailed analysis occurred at the level of the individual character. All characters on each page were coded for the following demographic characteristics: gender, visual portrayal (photograph or cartoon), type of character (human or animal), age (0-12 years, teens, 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60 plus), and occupation (high level professional, entertainer/professional athlete, business person, educator, blue collar, or clerical). Appearance characteristics, including dress (coded on two five point bipolar adjective scales: professional to casual, and provocative to conservative), and, using Lin's (1998) coding scheme, body revealment (coded as (1) for revealment or (0) for no revealment for each character's chest, stomach, waist, buttocks, and legs), physical shape (skinny/lean, fit, full-figured, chunky/large), and physical attractiveness (not attractive, attractive, very attractive) also were coded for each character. Finally, the setting (home, outside of home, fantasy, unable to determine, or other) and activities that the characters were engaged in were coded, using the categories from Smith's 1994 content analysis of advertisements during children's television programming. The activity categories included:

(1) Playing with a toy: character is playing with any type of toy

(2) Physical Activity: physical activity engaged in by character (excluding playing with a toy, antisocial activity, or performance); could be activities such as dancing, playing ball games, riding a bike, skateboarding, jumping rope, fencing, inline skating, surfing, horseback riding, gymnastics, etc.

(3) Antisocial activity: aggressive or negative social behavior (hitting, fighting, stealing, etc.)

(4) Passive activity: activity not involving physical, athletic-type movement, such as talking, watching television, reading, etc.

(5) Performance: an activity done before an audience, such as singing or playing in a band

Intercoder reliabilities for four coders were assessed by calculating the percent agreement for the site, page, and character level variables. Reliabilities of .9 or higher were achieved for all coded variables.

Results

Site analysis. Of the twenty sites coded, 50% were media sites, 30% were toys, 15% were education, and 5% were "other." Male characters were more likely to be in media-related Web sites, while females were more likely to be in toy sites, $X^2(3, N=164) = 16.83$, $p<.01$.

Page analysis. A total of 200 Web pages were coded. Background colors tended to be white (29%) or blue (16%), while text colors tended to be black (49%) or white (17%). A total of 940 pronouns were coded; of these, 83% were neutral, 12% were male, and 5% were female.

Character analysis. Who were the characters in children's Web sites? The sample yielded a total of 202 characters. Our analysis shows that males and females were evenly represented: 41% of the characters were male, 40% were female, and 19% could not be classified. Those characters who could not be classified (n=38) are excluded from the remainder of the analysis, leaving 164 characters (51% male). The characters were more likely to be animated (59%), and this did not vary by gender $X^2(1, N=164) = .02$, $p > .05$. They also were more often human (78%); of those characters who were animals (22%), males were more common than were females, $X^2(1, N=164) = 7.33$, $p<.05$. The characters tended to be young: 54% were in their teen years or younger. Females were more likely to be in this age range than were males, $X^2(7, N=164) = 50.98$, $p<.01$. The most common occupation portrayed was educator (21%), and more than two-thirds (69%) of characters in this occupation were female, $X^2(6, N=164) = 44.66$, $p<.01$.

In terms of the characters' physical appearances, they typically fell at the midpoint of the scale ($\mathbf{x}=3.26$) for type of dress (professional/casual), with no significant differences between male and female characters, $p>.05$, $t=-3.04$. Female characters

($\mathbf{x}$=2.38) were more provocatively dressed than were males ($\mathbf{x}$=2.90), p<.01, t=3.75. The vast majority (88%) of characters was fully clothed. The one body part that tended to be revealed was legs, with female characters' legs significantly more likely to be shown than were males, X^2(1, N=164) =5.56, p<.05. Characters tended to be classified as "fit" ($\mathbf{x}$=1.89), with no significant differences between male and female characters, t=3.78, p>.05. However, female characters ($\mathbf{x}$=2.00) were significantly more attractive than were males ($\mathbf{x}$=1.65), t=-5.30, p<.01. Descriptive statistics are listed in Table 1.

Our results partly align with Lin's (1998) analysis of television commercials, as she found significant differences between male and female portrayals of age and attractiveness. However, she also found discrepancies between male and female characters' physical shape and body revealment, a pattern that was not identified in our research (except for the tendency for female characters' legs to be revealed more often than males'). T-test comparisons between Lin's and the present study's results for attractiveness and physical shape are listed in Table 2. Male television characters were significantly more attractive than male Web characters, whereas female Web characters were significantly thinner than were female television characters.

Characters most often engaged in physical (18%) or passive activities (18%). Interestingly, no characters engaged in antisocial activities. There were no significant gender differences for the type of activities the characters performed, X^2(5, N=164) =5.55, p>.05. For the majority of characters (59%) a setting could not be determined. For those characters where it could, they were most often portrayed outside of the home (21%). Again, there were no significant differences by gender, X^2(4, N=164) =5.19, p>.05.

These findings stand in direct contrast to Smith's (1994) analysis of commercials aired during children's television programs. She found significant gender differences, with male characters more likely to be engaged in physical and antisocial activities, and more likely to be portrayed outside of the home. Table 3 contains chi-square statistics comparing Smith's findings with those of the present study's for the activity and setting variables. For physical activity, there was a significant relationship between gender of model and medium used. On television, male characters were more likely to be engaged in physical activities, whereas on Web sites, this pattern was not demonstrated. However, no significant relationships between gender of model and medium used were found for playing with toy, passive activity, or performance. Chi-square statistics for antisocial activity could not be calculated because no Web characters were engaged in that type of activity. For the setting variable 'outside of home,' there was a significant relationship between gender of character and medium used. Male television characters were more likely to be portrayed outside of the home; however, this pattern was not observed for Web characters. Chi-square statistics for inside home and fantasy could not be calculated due to small cell sizes.

Discussion

Our findings indicate that children's Web site audiences encounter a more gender-equitable, non-sexist environment, compared with what they typically view on television (e.g., Lin, 1998; Smith, 1994). In terms of sheer frequency, there was a fairly even distribution of female and male characters. Moreover, compared with television, there were fewer discrepancies between male and female characters in terms of physical appearance and body revealment, activities in which they are engaged, and the settings in which they are portrayed.

So, what does the typical children's Web site contain? Based on our analysis, audiences view sites composed of relatively gender-neutral colors (i.e., white, blue) and language. Further, they are equally likely to encounter male or female characters, and these characters tend to be young, fully clothed, and fit. However, we observed some patterns that conform to sex role stereotypic conventions. Children's Web site audiences will encounter female characters who are younger, more attractive, provocatively dressed, and more likely to occupy educational careers than their male counterparts. Further, a disturbing finding, in light of recent research showing the harmful effects of popular media on women's body image (e.g., Harrison, 1997; Harrison & Cantor, 1997), was that female Web characters were significantly thinner than their televised counterparts.

Our findings may be attributed to several factors. First, it is possible that no genres exist yet on the Web that marry sexism with economics and audiences. In traditional media, we find that female producers, as well as males, create sex role stereotypic content. This finding may be explained by the notion that these portrayals, whether in magazines (e.g., women's fashion magazines such as Cosmopolitan, Mademoiselle, etc.) or on television (e.g., soap operas) are a proven commodity because they are successful with audiences. Genres are built around formulas that draw large audiences and therefore assure economic success (e.g., Straubhaar & LaRose, 1997). However, the Web, compared with other media, is still in its infancy, and successful formats or genres are yet to be determined.

Second, returning to the notion that users have great flexibility and latitude when defining themselves online, it is possible that the Web has evolved as an environment in which the status cues from the real world are not supposed to matter. While this atmosphere originated in computer-mediated communication forums, such as chatrooms and MUDs, this sentiment may have carried over into entertainment content. Thus, content creators may be reluctant to violate this ethos with sex role stereotypic portrayals (Wynn & Katz, 1997). Further, because audience ratings of Web sites are in their infancy[3], content creators may not know the demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age) of their audience. Thus, they may strive to present gender equitable, non-threatening sites to appeal to the greatest variety of users.

Third, while the Web combines the technical aspects of other media, at present it tends to be heavily text- and graphics-based, due to the bandwidth limitations for streaming audio and video. Thus, its presentation of images differs from that which is found in television. In the television studies we used as a basis for comparison (Lin, 1998; Smith, 1994), characteristics which evoke gender cues, such as movement, interactions, etc. among characters could be easily observed. However, on the Web, characters tend to be still images, making it more difficult to identify certain gender-related characteristics, such as degree of activity, dominance/subordinance, and even the setting in which characters are portrayed. It is possible that as video and audio components become more widespread on the Web, sex role stereotypic conventions from television might be carried over to the online environment. This proposition is supported by our finding that those sex role stereotypic characteristics which can be easily incorporated into still images (e.g., provocative dress, physical attractiveness) were identified in our sample.

This research serves as an exploratory investigation of the degree of sex role stereotyping on the Web. Future research could take several directions. First, further investigations may examine why fewer discrepancies between male and female characters exist in children's Web sites as compared with traditional media portrayals. How are these sites created? Do producers make conscious decisions regarding the portrayals of male and female characters? Second, to improve upon the design of the present study, a larger sample of Web sites could be analyzed. One of the problems when content analyzing the Web is that its vastness makes it difficult to determine when a representative sample has been drawn. Perhaps future research could identify better methods of sampling Web sites. Third, adult sites, in addition to children's, should be examined to determine whether they contain a higher degree of sex role stereotypic portrayals. To eliminate the possibility that the present study's results are an anomaly, this analysis needs to be replicated with other samples. Finally, an important extension of this and other Web content analyses is to measure the effects of these sites on users. Do children who use the Web hold less sex role stereotypic attitudes than those children who are only exposed to television? We may infer effects from content analyses, but until these effects are empirically measured, we will be unable to determine the extent to which the content of Web sites is affecting users.

Notes

[1] Web 21 is an online service that ranks Web sites according to the following methodology: logs from proxy servers are transferred daily via file transfer protocol (FTP) to Web21. These logs represent the surfing patterns of over 100,000 Web users from around the world (about 60% of the sample is from North America). America Online (AOL), Prodigy, and Compuserve users are not included in the sample.

[2] To select the sample of web pages, numbers were drawn from a table of random numbers, and the corresponding link from the page was selected. For example, if the number randomly selected was 'three,' the coder would start counting links at the top left hand corner of the page, and work from left to right and top to bottom until they reached the third link.

[3] Currently, Media Metrix (www.mediametrix.com) conducts Web audience ratings research.

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Table 1

Male and Female Appearance Characteristics

Male Characters

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Professional/ Casual	83	1	5	2.98	1.28
Provocative/ Conservative	83	1	5	2.90	.85
Physical Shape	83	1	4	2.08	.74
Physical Attractiveness	83	1	3	1.65	.48

Female Characters

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Professional/ Casual	81	1	5	3.56	1.16
Provocative/ Conservative	81	1	5	2.38	.93
Physical Shape	81	1	4	1.69	.58
Physical Attractiveness	81	1	3	2.00	.35

Table 2

Appearance Characteristics: Comparisons of

Web vs. Television Characters

Variable[1]	Television Characters (Lin, 1998)		Web Characters		
	M	SD	M	SD	T value
Male Attractiveness	1.81	.47	1.65	.48	2.67*
Female Attractiveness	2.10	.60	2.00	.35	1.82
Male Physical Shape	2.21	.80	2.08	.74	1.37
Female Physical Shape	2.83	.73	1.69	.58	14.27*

*Significant at the .01 level

[1] Degrees of Freedom:

Male Characters=347

Female Characters=318

Table 3

Activity and Setting Variables: Comparisons between Television and Web Characters

Physical Activity:

Medium	Female Characters	Male Characters
Television (Smith, 1994)	4	12
Web	18	11

$X^2=5.61, p<.05$

Playing with Toy:

Medium	Female Characters	Male Characters
Television (Smith, 1994)	22	19
Web	2	7

$X^2=2.92, p>.05$

Passive Activity:

Medium	Female Characters	Male Characters
Television (Smith, 1994)	4	6
Web	15	15

$X^2=.31, p>.05$

Table 3 (continued)

Activity and Setting Variables: Comparisons between Television and Web Characters

Performance:

Medium	Female Characters	Male Characters
Television (Smith, 1994)	1	5
Web	11	8

$X^2=3.11, p>.05$

Setting—Outside of Home:

Medium	Female Characters	Male Characters
Television (Smith, 1994)	6	25
Web	20	15

$X^2=9.83, p<.05$

MPAA Film Ratings:
Are they a Disservice to Parents?

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Paper presented to the Mass Communication Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Conference, New Orleans, LA, August, 1999.

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MPAA Film Ratings:
Are they a Disservice to Parents?

The MPAA claims that film ratings are a guide for parents when deciding what movies their children can see. One criticism of the MPAA is that--despite evidence suggesting that violent content is more harmful to children than sexual content--they "target" sex. Here, it is hypothesized that parents of minors will have different opinions about children and sexual or violent film content than other adults. A telephone survey of 368 adults in Onandaga County, NY was conducted and used to test the hypotheses, which received limited support.

MPAA Film Ratings:
Are they a Disservice to Parents?

INTRODUCTION

In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) replaced the Production Code with an age-based ratings system. MPAA president Jack Valenti formed the Code (later Classification) and Ratings Administration (CARA) to review films and assign them a rating. Since most of the board members were at least 50 years old, Valenti also instituted a student intern program and added two people in their twenties to CARA. One of them, Stephen Farber, would become one of the first and most vocal critics of the ratings system. After leaving CARA six months into a one-year appointment, Farber wrote *The Movie Rating Game.* In it, he claimed that "much of the classification was actually done with an eye to what disturbs *adults* [his emphasis]. G-rated [suitable for general audiences] movies were not necessarily those most suitable for children; they were the ones the board considered least likely to offend adults" (p. 31).

Today, the board is different but the criticism remains the same. Valenti replaced the Production Code veterans and mental health professionals that served on the original board with "non-professionals" meeting the following criteria (www.mpaa.org/movieratings/ about/content3, 1996, p.1):

> [They] must have a shared parenthood experience, must be possessed of an intelligent maturity, and most of all, have the capacity to put themselves in the role of most American parents so they can view a film and apply a rating that most parents would find suitable and helpful in aiding their decisions about their children's movie going.

In their study of and recommendations for changes in the ratings system, Wilson, Linz, and Randall (1990) concur with Farber, but change one key term. They agree that the current ratings system is not based on what is harmful to children, but "what is offensive to *parents*" [my emphasis] (p. 443). The authors' word choice reflects a change in emphasis from adults to parents that parallels the shift in CARA's make-up. And in the eyes of the MPAA, it's parents that matter (www.mpaa.org/movieratings/about/ content3, 1996, p. 1):

> The MPAA's goal is to offer parents advance information about films so that they can decide what movie they want their children to see or not to see....If you are 18 or over, or

> if you have no children, the rating system has no meaning for you. Ratings are meant for parents, no one else.

The primary areas of content that the Ratings Board examines in a film are violence, language, nudity, sensuality, and drug abuse as well as overall theme, with no special emphasis on any one element (www.mpaa.org/movieratings/about/content3, 1996, p. 1). Despite this, a culturally based double standard exists placing a higher emphasis on keeping depictions of sexuality than violence away from the eyes of children. In fact, two studies include this double standard as one of their *assumptions* (Wilson, Linz & Randall, 1990; Linz, Wilson & Donnerstein, 1992).

The purpose of this paper is to incorporate Wilson, Linz and Randall's assumption about the MPAA's double standard into an argument against their "offensive to parents" claim. I believe that parents support the MPAA's greater restrictions on movies' sexual content (over violent content) because they fear that their minor children will imitate the sexual content more than they fear imitation of violent content, but not because the parents themselves are offended by it.

THEORY

Following the lead of Fr. Daniel Lord and Martin Quigley, the Catholic authors of the original Motion Picture Production Code, film historian Frank Miller calls film sex and violence "sins that attract" and "sins that repel" respectively (p. 52). Miller reflects the early Catholic watchdogs' awareness of the potentially different effects of film sex and violence on people. Lord and Quigley were troubled by the increasing amounts of sex in 1930s films being used to attract viewers of all ages. These criticisms have never subsided.

If film sex is a "sin that attracts," wouldn't it be attractive to parents as well as non-parents? Further, wouldn't its counter, violence (a "sin that repels"), be more offensive to adults? In one random phone survey, researchers asked 304 Seminole County, Florida, adults if they were willing to ban various forms of sexual, violent and sexually violent media, including films (Fisher, Cook & Shirkey, 1994). They found that over 70% of respondents supported censoring sexually violent media, about half supported censoring nonsexual violent media, and about one third supported censoring nonviolent sexually explicit movies (Fisher, Cook & Shirkey, 1994). The results show support for banning the various types of media completely (for children *and* adults), but there is more support for censoring nonsexual, violent media than nonviolent, sexually explicit movies. Put simply, the adults who took part in this survey were more troubled by portrayals of violence than portrayals of sex in the media.

If media portrayals of violence offend adults more than media portrayals of sex, why do the parents who assign ratings to films for CARA emphasize sex over violence? When Miramax sued the MPAA over the X rating given to Pedro Almodovar's *Atame!* (*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*), Supreme Court Justice Charles E. Ramos criticized the MPAA's rating system (1990):

> An often leveled criticism of the MPAA is that violence in films is condoned to a far greater extent than displays of sexual activity. Without professional guidance or input, it may well be that the interests of children are not adequately protected, or are even endangered by providing [a cover] of acceptability to extremely violent and psychologically damaging films (p. 18).

Ultimately, Ramos arrived at a similar conclusion as Wilson, et al. (1990): specifically, that the MPAA allows more violent material than sexual material into the films it assigns a rating to, and that the violent material can potentially cause more harm to children than the sexual material.

Media portrayals of violence and how it affects the viewer are the topic of more media effects studies than any other subject (Bryant & Zillmann, 1996). On the other hand, media portrayals of sexually explicit material and how they affect the viewer is a more elusive study topic, especially when examining non-pornographic films. Researchers have primarily examined the effects of pornography on people's (mostly men's) behavior. In a meta-analysis summarizing the effects of pornography, Allen, D'Alessio & Brezgel (1995) found that various authors "disagreed about the nature of the effect of exposure to pornography on the subsequent behavior of individuals" (p. 259). Even the terminology assigned to sexually explicit material is not agreed upon. In the same article, Allen, et al. define pornography as

> media material used or intended to increase sexual arousal. Such material generally has verbal or visual images of exposed sexual organs and depictions of sexual behaviors....Generally, researchers ...label this...as *obscenity, sexually arousing material, erotica, cheesecake, beefcake,* and of course, *pornography* [their italics] (p. 259).

Other authors (Malamuth, 1993; Senn & Radtke, 1990; Steinem, 1980) make distinctions between pornography and erotica (quoted in Malamuth, 1993): "Erotica is defined as images that have as their focus the depiction of mutually pleasurable sexual expression between people who have enough power to be there by positive choice [with] no sexist or violent connotations and portray equal power dynamics between individuals as well as between the model(s) and the camera/photographer" (p. 572). Pornography suggests an unbalanced power relationship, or involves sexually explicit depictions that degrade individuals (Malamuth, 1993; Senn & Radtke, 1990). In effects experiments, researchers have distinguished between sexually explicit *and degrading* films versus sexually explicit *and non-degrading* films with conflicting results (Allen, et al., 1995; Demare, Lips, & Briere, 1993; Fisher & Grenier, 1994; Intons-Peterson, Roskos-Ewoldsen, Thomas, Shirley, & Blut, 1989; Linz, Donnerstein & Penrod, 1988). Some researchers (Malamuth, 1993; Allen, et al., 1995) make distinctions within the content of pornography based on the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography (1986) as: nudity, nonviolent sexual behavior and violent sexual behavior. In terms of the MPAA and movie ratings, perhaps the simplest distinction between pornographic material and non-pornographic material is that sexual acts that are simulated in non-pornographic movies are shown in pornographic movies. On a more pragmatic level, distributors of pornography are not members of the MPAA and are not required to submit their films for a rating. In terms of this study, I am interested in films that are submitted to the MPAA and assigned a rating, not pornography.

Researchers have examined fright reactions to scary movies. Cantor, perhaps the leading researcher in this area (1994), defines fright as "an *immediate emotional response* [her italics] that is typically of relatively short duration....The focus here is on emotional reactions involving...anxiety, distress, and increased physiological arousal" (p. 214). The MPAA added PG-13 to its rating in the wake of especially frightening scenes in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Gremlins* as a guide to further assist parents in deciding what's appropriate for their children.[2] It is important to remember that unlike the R rating, PG-13 does not restrict admittance to a film by children, regardless of their age. Wilson, Hoffner & Cantor (1987) found that approximately 75% of children in two separate samples reported being scared by something they saw on television or in a movie. Cantor and Reilly (1982) found that parents' estimates of the frequency of their children's fright reactions to media were significantly lower than their children's self-reports. They also found that parents' estimates of their children's level of exposure to frightening media were also significantly lower than children's self-reports, based primarily on different definitions of what's considered scary. Sparks (1986b) reported that almost 50% of the 4- to 10-year olds he interviewed had seen PG-rated films *Poltergeist* and *Jaws,* and many had seen the R-rated films *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* at home.

"Slasher" films like *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* have also been the subject of content analyses. Donnerstein, Linz and Penrod (1987) claim that "while the sex is not explicit [in slasher films], but merely suggestive, the violence is graphically displayed and is overwhemingly directed at women" (p. 113). Others challenged the assertion that slasher-film violence is focused on women, but note that female victims spend a longer time suffering on-screen than male victims (Cowan & O'Brien, 1990; Weaver, 1991; Molitor & Sapolsky, 1993). In these studies, the results were mixed regarding the link between sexual and violent content in slasher films.

Some studies have been conducted using adolescents and their mechanisms for coping with (Hoffner, 1997: Hoffner, 1995), enjoyment of (Oliver, 1993) and motivations for viewing (Johnston, 1995) horror films. Finding studies that focus on adolescents' exposure to sexual material is much more difficult. Bryant (1985) provides some useful results about teenagers' exposure to sexually explicit media. In a stratified survey, he talked to 600 people divided into three age groups: 13-15 years old, 16-18 years old, and 19-39 years old. Each group was comprised of 100 men and 100 women. Bryant (1985) found that nearly 70% of 13-15 year olds reported exposure to an average of 6.3 sexually oriented R-rated films before the age of 13, and 92% of 13-15 year olds had already seen such a film, with an average first exposure at 14 years, 8 months. Malamuth and Billings (1986) found that male adolescents' quantity of exposure to pornography may not tell the entire story: "People raised with little education about sexuality or in families in which sex is treated as taboo may be more susceptible to the influences of certain types of explicit media than people reared with considerable education about sex" (quoted in Malamuth, 1993, p. 570). Malamuth (1993) points out that "people without much sex education may be more apt to use explicit media as a primary source of information" (p. 570). One study found that a sample of 14-17 year olds found media second only to friends as a primary source of sexual information, ahead of parents, school or church (Greenberg, Linsangan, & Soderman, 1993).

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[2] One scene in the film *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* features a human heart being pulled from a character's

Children and exposure to R-rated films were the subject of a Michigan study. Among the findings in the study were: male and female 14- and 15-year-olds reported having seen 7 of the 50 most popular R-rated movies in the past 3 years in a theater; boys and girls were equally likely to rent R-rated videos; and boys were more likely than girls to choose R-rated movies on standard or pay cable television channels (Greenberg, Ku & Li, 1989). One survey examining adolescents' exposure to sexual material does indicate that adolescents see almost twice as many R-rated films than films of *all other* ratings combined (Buerkel-Rothfuss, Strouse, Pettey & Shatzer, 1993). Movies generally contain more explicit portrayals of sex than television programs, with the typical 90-minute R-rated film including between 14 and 21 intimate sex acts, and unlike television, often visually portrayed (Brown, Greenberg & Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993). Through content analyses of R-rated films, Greenberg, Siemicki and Dorfman (1993) found that virtually every R-rated film contains at least one nude scene, and some of adolescents' favorites (*Porky's, Fast Times at Ridgemont High)* contain as many as 15 instances of sexual intercourse in a single film. Yang and Linz (1990) found that R-rated movies contained 5 times more violent and/or sexually violent activities than either X-rated or XXX-rated movies. Stated simply, most adolescents are viewing R-rated films that contain sexual, violent or sexually violent content.

Do these films inspire imitation by adolescents? Is the MPAA's double standard grounded in the fear of adolescent imitation of film sex, the "sin that attracts?" According to Malamuth

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chest; in *Gremlins*, one of the furry creatures is thrown into a microwave and is shown exploding.

(1989), the "effects" issue is "by no means simple, direct imitation" (Quoted in Malamuth, 1993, p. 569). But, the fear of imitation of film sex may explain why parents are more concerned with keeping those portrayals away from their children's eyes than portrayals of violence. This brings us back to this paper's titular question: "Do parents' attitudes reflect the MPAA's bias?" Or, is the reverse true?

Fear of Imitation

Albert Bandura's (1979) social learning theory provides the ideal framework for the discussion of the effects of media images on behavior. Bryant and Zillmann (1996) describe four conditions for social learning of media violence:

> The violent behavior of the actor must be seen, read, or listened to (attentional process); cognitive representations of the violent behavior must be retained (retention process); the learner must have the potential to replicate the action (production processes); and the learner must have sufficient desire or will to perform the violent behavior that was witnessed (motivational processes) (p. 197).

Better known as "imitation," Bandura (1994) links learned behaviors to observing media violence. Though theories dealing with cognitive and emotional effects of media violence are often examined, the locus of this discussion is behavioral effects, specifically the notion of imitation.

Researchers' examination of the behavioral effects of sexually explicit content is a more tenuous situation. Specifically, most experimental work involves pornography and does not involve children. By MPAA ratings alone, the theatrically released versions do not qualify as pornography. More importantly, the major distinction between pornographic films and non-pornographic films is that the former shows penetration while the latter simulates it. Unlike experiments involving violent content linked to aggressive behavior like Bandura's Bobo doll experiments (Bandura, 1965; Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1963; Bandura & Walters, 1963), ethical considerations prohibit experiments involving sexually explicit material and children (perhaps paralleling the culturally based MPAA bias). For this reason, studies involving adolescents' exposure to R-rated or pornographic material have been restricted to survey research, investigating correlational rather than causal hypotheses.

Imitation of viewed violence is an often-used behavioral approach to studying the effects of different media on adolescents, the basic rationale being that children watch (television or film) characters solve problems with violence and subsequently may learn that this is an appropriate way to behave. What if the same standard is applied to sexual content and children's behavior? Looking again at the four processes involved with social learning of media violence, they appear to apply equally well to media sexual content. The first step--sexual content being seen--is a central issue in this study. If the MPAA is determined to prevent viewing of a film's most graphic or explicit sexual content, evidenced by the content's presence in a director's cut videocassette, are they trying to halt the process of social learning and the possibility for imitation? Discussion of the remaining components of social learning further illustrates why the answer to this question may be "yes." Regarding the retention process, it can be argued that sequences with the most graphic sexual content can be a film's most memorable, and therefore most readily retained.

It's the final two components that may provide the strongest support for the idea that the MPAA is more concerned with sexual content than violent content. Called the production and motivational processes, they deal with the learner's replicability of viewed material and the learner's desire to perform the behavior (respectively). Does anything better characterize adolescents in the early years of sexual maturity than the realization of sexual ability and the desire to act upon it?

Martin (1996) conducted interviews with teenage and young adult men and women about puberty and first sexual experiences, and found that boys and girls experience these differently. She found that girls have greater feelings of awkwardness and objectification than boys, created by the onset of menstruation and breast development. Similarly, she found that while boys equate feeling grown up and masculine with first sexual experience, girls often feel confused and unsure of themselves.

Yet both groups experience their first sexual intercourse at an average age of less than 17 (Zelnik & Shah, 1983), the minimum age the MPAA has established for unchaperoned admittance to an R-rated film. With adolescents, it is not unreasonable to think that Bandura's notion of imitation can be applied *more appropriately* to sexual content than to violent content. For this age group, the ability to act violently has been present for substantially longer than the ability to act sexually, whereas the opposite is true of sexual behaviors. The "newness" of sex, along with a biological desire to behave sexually, make the *fear of* imitation (by adolescents) a major concern of the CARA "parents with no special qualifications" that assign a rating to a film. Certainly, the potentially negative consequences of teen sexual behavior may be the impetus behind CARA's thinking. Although the number is steadily decreasing, nearly 500,000 teenagers give birth every year, over 11,000 of those teens were under fifteen years of age (Ventura, Curtin & Mathews, 1998). As many as 1 out of 6 sexually active adolescents has a sexually transmitted disease (CDC Report, 1989); this number has also decreased in the 1990s, but "compared to older adults, adolescents...are at higher risk for acquiring STDs" (CDC Report, 1997).

Studies linking exposure to pornography and sexual behavior exist. Goldstein, Kant & Hartmann (1973) studied rapists, and found that their exposure to pornography in childhood was relatively low, yet they were more affected by it. The rapists were more likely to come from homes where sex was treated as a taboo subject. Allen, et al., (1995) state that "the issue with any entertainment forum is the extent to which the material ceases to operate as entertainment and starts to serve as a source of information" (p. 263). Like most of the media effects theories, Social Learning has been applied to studies of pornography. College students report that pornography serves as a source of information about sexual behavior (Bryant & Brown, 1989; Duncan, 1990; Duncan & Donnelly, 1991; Duncan & Nicholson, 1991), and Malamuth (1993) considers reasonable the assumption that effects found in studies of young men would be as strong or stronger for adolescents.

Hypotheses

Returning to the early Catholic notion of movie sex as a "sin that attracts" versus movie violence as a "sin that repels," the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Adults are more offended by graphic violence in movies and less offended by graphic sex in movies.

For hypothesis one, I believe that adults will support the notion that film sex is less repellent than film violence. "Offense" (or, more specifically, "offended by") refers to anger, displeasure or wounded feelings caused by either violent or sexual movie content. "Graphic sex in movies" refers to detailed portrayals of simulated sexual practices, often including nudity, in films. "Graphic violence in movies" refers to detailed portrayals of simulated assault or murder, often including bloodshed, in films. "Adults" refer to the entire group of survey respondents.

To test the idea that parents of minor children are not offended by film sex, but fear imitation by children, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Parents of minor children are more likely to agree that children imitate movie sex more than that they themselves are offended by graphic sex in movies.

For hypothesis two, I believe that parents fear of minor children's imitation of sexual film content will result in their agreeing more strongly with that statement than the offense to movie sex statement, which "attracts"--not "repels" adults. "Parents of minor children" are those adult respondents who self-identify as having children under the age of 18. "Imitate movie sex" refers to children mirroring sexual behaviors seen in movies. "Offended by graphic sex" is defined above.

The following hypotheses address the imitation statements among different groups based upon parental status:

H3: Parents of minor children are more likely to agree that children imitate movie sex than adults without minor children.

H4: Parents of minor children are less likely to agree that children imitate movie violence than adults without minor children.

For hypothesis three, I believe that parents of minor children, because they have children who could potentially imitate the sex they see in movies, are more likely to agree with the statement than other adults who don't have children under 18 years of age. "Parents of minor children" and "imitate movie sex" are defined above. "Adults without minor children" are adult respondents who self-identity as either not having children at all or having no children under 18 years of age.

For hypothesis four, parents of minor children whose children are exposed to portrayals of violence in movies and television programs, will more strongly disagree with the imitation of movie violence statement than the other groups who don't have children (at all or under the age of 18 respectively).

As a way of testing if respondents will answer questions about film sex and film violence differently, I have constructed a series of age-scale questions.[3] These questions ask respondents to assign a minimum age at which children may see various types of sexual or violent film content. The list is made up of examples of film content that are likely to effect the rating given to a film by the MPAA. I will address the age scale questions for different groups according to parental status with the following two hypotheses:

H5: Parents of minor children will set age limits higher for types of sexual content than adults without minor children.

H6: Parents of minor children will set age limits lower for types of violent content than adults without minor children.

For hypothesis five, I believe a higher fear of imitation of sexual content by children will lead parents of minor children to set the age limits higher than other adults. For hypothesis six, I think parents of minor children believe that their children will not act violently after seeing film violence, and will not set age limits as high as adults who don't have minor children. For both hypotheses, "set age limits" refer to respondents' answers to questions asking them to provide a minimum age a child should be before seeing various types of movie content.

METHOD

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire contained a total of 134 questions, 13 of which were directly related to this study. Ten individual researchers' interests were represented by questions found in the survey. A series of nine "minimum age" questions regarding children and various types of film content were also included in the study. Two different versions of the questionnaire were pretested, and 34 randomly selected respondents completed the interviews. As a result of the pretest, various questions were eliminated, others were rephrased and some new questions were added,[4]and a single version of the questionnaire for the survey was agreed upon.

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[3] For a complete list of age-scale questions, see Appendix A.

Sampling

The survey team's goal was to achieve approximately 400 completed questionnaires from a randomly sampled population of listed phone numbers from Onondaga County, NY. A sample size of 2000 phone numbers was assembled and distributed into 40 replicates, each containing 50 phone numbers. Only adults 18 or over were eligible for participation in the survey.

Data Collection

The survey interviews were conducted by eight doctoral students and 30 additional graduate students. Before the field period started, each interviewer received approximately three hours of training; survey supervisors received additional instruction. The most recent AAPOR standards were followed for the purpose of call outcome coding. During the two-week field period, a total of forty four-hour shifts were used to conduct the survey. Supervisors verified slightly more than 10% of completed questionnaires.

Coding

Most of the questions on the survey instrument were nominal or closed-ended, using Likert scales or other indeces, including all questions relevant to this study. For all questions, responses of "don't know" and "refused" were categorized as missing data and were excluded from the analysis.

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[4] With regard to this study, changes following the pretest were: (a) the "minimum age" questions had a "never" category added to them; (b) some of the "minimum age" questions were dropped, and the order of the remaining nine was changed; and (c) the two Likert scale questions regarding offensiveness were added.

RESULTS

The response rate for the survey was 36%.[5] Percentages for categorical variables are presented in Table 1. The minimum age questions are presented as categorical variables here to distinguish between respondents who set age limits for various types of violent or sexual film content at age 21 or less and those who set the age limits higher than 21 or said "never" in response to the questions. More respondents felt that children should not be allowed to see portrayals of oral sex than portrayals of sexual intercourse in movies, which may reflect a view of the former as a more deviant behavior than the latter.

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2 for all interval and ratio level variables. Overall, adult respondents were slightly more offended by graphic sex in movies (3.53) than by graphic violence (3.49), and believed that children are more likely to imitate movie violence (3.99) than movie sex (3.76). Adult respondents set the age limit for children viewing portrayals of oral sex (17.64 years of age) higher than for portrayals of sexual intercourse (17.05 years of age). Seventeen is the age employed by the MPAA in its two most restrictive ratings (R and NC-17); hence, respondents' age limits for the "most severe" of the sexual content questions do appear to coincide with the MPAA's guidelines.

Hypotheses one tested the idea that movie violence is more offensive than movie sex. Tables 4 shows that the hypothesis is not supported. Adults were actually more offended by sexual content (3.53) than by violent content (3.49).

Hypothesis two tested the belief that parents of minor children fear the imitation of movie sex by children more than being personally offended by graphic sex in movies. Table 5 indicates that hypothesis two was supported ($t=2.25$, $df=133$, $p<.05$), suggesting that parents of minor children are less offended by sexual content and more concerned with the potential for imitation of sexual behavior by children. In terms of sexual movie content, adults believe that imitation by children outweighs personal offensiveness.

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[5] Based on the 1998 AAPOR formula for calculating response rate: RR=(I+P/((I+P) + (R+NC+O) + (UN+UO)).

For hypotheses three and four, I looked at differences between adult respondents who have minor children and adults who do not have minor children (both non-parents and parents of adult children) regarding the imitation of sexual or violent content questions. Table 6 shows the independent t-tests for these two hypotheses. Neither hypothesis was supported, suggesting that all adults, regardless of parental status, have similar feelings about the likelihood of children imitating the sex or violence they see in movies.

In hypotheses five and six, I test for differences between adults with minor children and adults without minor children in response to a series of minimum age questions for different types of content. Three violent movie content variables were summed to form a violent content scale (alpha=.79). Six sexual movie content variables formed a sexual content scale (alpha=.93). Table 7 shows that neither hypothesis was supported: There is no significant difference between adults who have minor children and adults who do not with regard to minimum age limits for sexual or violent movie content.

Pearson's correlation coefficients for the imitation, offensivenss and age scale variables were also performed and can be found in Table 8. All correlations between the six variables were positive and significant at at least the .01 level. The strongest correlations were between the two scale variables (N=209, r=.77, p<.001), the two offensiveness variables (N=364, r=.70, p<.001) and the two imitation variables (N=364, r=.60, p<.001), suggesting that respondents gave similar minimum ages for sexual and violent content, were offended by both sexual and violent content and feared imitation of both types of content by children.

The correlation results in Table 8 present some predictable results. As expected, the strongest correlations were between the sexual and violent movie content age scales (.77); the two offensiveness statements (.70); and the two imitation statements (.60). Hence, respondents set similar minimum age limits for both sexual and violent film content, had similar levels of offensiveness to graphic sex and violence in movies, and had some agreement in response to the two imitation statements. The correlations between like film content variables (either sexual or violent) were substantially weaker. For example, correlations between the sexual content minimum age limit scale and the offensiveness to graphic movie sex statement and children's imitation of movie sex statement were relatively low (.30 and .28 respectively). The same was true for correlations between the violent content minimum age scale and offensiveness to graphic movie violence and children's imitation of movie violence (.32 and .31 respectively). This suggested that respondents did not discriminate much between sexual and violent content when setting minimum age limits for various types of sexual or violent film content.

Tables 9 and 10 show the results of hierarchical regression analysis of demographic variables, parental status, offensiveness to graphic movie violence and sex and imitation of movie violence and sex on minimum age limits for violent and sexual content scales (respectively). For the violent content scale, only the offensiveness to graphic violence (beta=.30, $p<.05$) and imitation of movie violence (beta=.21, $p<.05$) variables had significant effects (R^2 changes of .10 and .04 respectively) on the dependent variable. Similarly, for the sexual content variables scale, offensiveness to graphic sex (beta=.34, $p<.001$) and imitation of movie sex (beta=.18, $p<.05$) variables had significant effects (R^2 changes of .11 and .04 respectively) on the dependent variable. In addition, respondent's gender (beta=.18, $p<.05$) was significant, suggesting that women's responses to the sexual content variables scale questions were higher than men's.

The results of these tests indicate that people do in fact discriminate between violent and sexual content when considering a film's appropriateness for children. The effects of personal offensiveness to graphic violence and the belief that children imitate movie violence--while controlling for the effects of demographic variables and whether or not a person has minor children, on respondents' answers to minimum age for violent content questions--were significant, accounting for 14% of those responses. More importantly, the effects of personal offensiveness to graphic sex and the belief that children imitate movie sex were not significant. The same was true for the effects of offensiveness to sexual content and belief that children imitate movie sex on the minimum age limits for sexual content. Hence, there appears to be a uniformity in the way adults view sex and violence in terms of what age children should be before seeing various types of content. The uniformity is not indiscriminate, as the correlations may have suggested. Instead, there is a uniformity in terms of offensiveness, imitation and minimum age limits based on the type of content (either violent or sexual).

DISCUSSION

Martin Quigley and Fr. Daniel Lord, the Catholic authors of the original Production Code (the predecessor to film ratings) believed that "attractive" film sex and "repellent" film violence needed to be treated differently in terms of appropriateness for audiences. Originally, they made no distinction between adults and children with regard to film content. Today, we do make these distinctions, and what is appropriate for adults is not always appropriate for children. The ultimate decision of what is appropriate for children under the age of eighteen is left up to parents, who often rely on ratings to make informed decisions. The purpose of the MPAA's film rating system is to provide parents with a guide that can help them make these decisions. CARA, the board that reviews films submitted for a rating, is comprised of adults who meet the MPAA's sole criterion: They are parents.

Critics of the ratings system charge that the film rating system is inherently flawed, because decisions are not based on what is potentially harmful to children, but what offends adults (Farber, 1972; Wilson, et al., 1990). The scientific community and other groups are concerned with the (negative) effects of violent content, sexual content or a combination of the two on children's behavior. Bandura's (1994) notion of "imitation" from his social learning theory provides the foundation for this discussion. Adults' belief that children imitate the violence or sex they see in films is a major motivating factor in ratings decisions, outweighing adults' personal offensiveness.

A second major criticism of the ratings system is that the MPAA does not treat film sex and violence equally when assigning a rating to a film. Despite the MPAA's claims to the contrary, critics charge that film sex is treated more harshly (Wilson, et. al., 1990) or, conversely, that film violence is treated more leniently (Ramos, 1990), with regard to ratings.

This study seeks to address both of these issues at their point of intersection. More specifically, I will employ the counter of the first criticism as a means of support for the second. I agree that the MPAA does treat film sex more harshly in terms of ratings, and that some adults feel that its more acceptable for younger children to view graphic violence than it is for them to view graphic sex. I do not think that this is because those adults are offended by film sex; on the contrary, I assert that some adults' belief that children will imitate movie sex overrides their being personally offended by this type of content. This assertion was tested with four hypotheses.[6] Differences between adults with minor children and adults without minor children were tested with four hypotheses.

The results for this study are based on a survey of adult respondents from Onondaga County in New York (N=368). Responsdents were asked how strongly they agreed with statements about offense to sexual and violent film content, as well as how much they agreed with statements about children imitating each type of content. In addition, adults were asked to assign a minimum age that children should be in order to view various types of sexual or violent content.

Hypothesis one addresses the notion that film violence is more offensive than film sex. The hypothesis was not supported; in fact, film sex is *slightly* more offensive than film violence. In his book, Farber (1972) discusses a shift that he (and others) believe took place in the late 1960s, when the modern-day ratings system replaced the Production Code in response to the increasingly graphic portrayals of both sex and violence in movies. Farber, one of the original two graduate student interns Jack Valenti appointed to the ratings board in the late 1960s, found himself deciding on ratings for movies in concert with mental health professionals and people leftover from the old Production Code office (the makeup of the original board was noticably different than today). Of primary importance to Farber was that the other ratings board members'average age was nearly twice that of the two student interns. He found that, in terms of ratings, the older members were much more concerned with sexual content than violent content, while Farber and the other student intern felt that violence was more troubling. Perhaps this is what happened in this study. The mean age of respondents (48) suggests a slight over-representation of older adults, who may be more offended by movie sex than movie violence (I came across a study that says something to the effect that older and younger people are most offended by sexual content--I have to track it down). That notwithstanding, it appears that respondents are almost equally offended by both film sex and violence. They are neither more "repelled by" film violence nor more "attracted to" film sex.

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[6] The phrase "some adults" refers, specifically, to adults who identify themselves as having minor children.

In hypothesis two, I tested Farber (1972) and Wilson, et al.'s (1990) claim that adults' personal offensiveness (by film sex) outweighs their belief in harmful media effects (children's imitation of film sex) for parents with minor children. It was hypothesized that the opposite would be true for respondents who identified themselves as having minor children. The hypothesis was supported; additional tests suggested that the same holds true for all adult respondents (N=364) for both film sex and film violence. Even though adults are offended by movie sex and violence, their belief that children imitate what they see is stronger.

The offense and imitation statements in the questionnaire were both straightforward and general.[7] In other words, no specific examples accompanied the individual statements, allowing respondents to define "movie sex" and "movie violence" for themselves. Likewise, the word "children," with no indication of age, was used for the imitation statements. This left substantial room for interpretation from respondents. For example, in suggesting an alternative approach to rating films, Wilson, et al. (1990) indicate that while the "fantasy" violence often found in horror films can have a more detrimental effect on children under the age of twelve, "realistic" violence often found in crime dramas can have a greater negative effects on slightly older children who can differentiate between types of violence more adroitly than younger kids. Except for the word "graphic" accompanying "sex" and "violence" in the offensiveness statements, respondents were allowed to conceptualize the statements any way they saw fit. Perhaps the lack of support for hypothesis one can further be explained by this lack of specificty: When respondents heard the phrase "graphic sex" in the offensiveness statement, some may have thought of pornography.

With the next two hypotheses, I asserted that respondents who identified themselves as having minor children would have different responses from other adults. More specifically, I believed that parents with minor children would more strongly agree that children imitate movie sex and the opposite would be true in terms of movie violence. The results for imitation of movie violence were virtually identical, yielding both the highest means and lowest standard deviations in this study. All adults, regardless of parental status, strongly believe that children imitate movie violence. Although the hypothesis regarding children imitating movie sex was also not supported, an interesting result emerged. The mean for parents of minors was *lower* than that of other adults. This may suggest a "not-my-kid" attitude among parents of minor children, who are less willing to agree with the notion of young people imitating the sex they see in movies. In highnsight, I believe that changing the word "believe" to "fear" in the imitation statements may have yielded significant results between these two groups. As the MPAA claims, ratings are guides for parents of minor children. If the statement in the questionnaire read, "I fear that children imitate the sex they see in movies," parents of minor children may care if they imitate movie sex, while other adults will not care if they do or not. Since the word "fear" was not used, I can say that parents of minors are no more likely to agree that kids imitate movie sex and violence than other adults.

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[7] See Appendix A.

With the final two hypotheses, I asked respondents to set minimum age limits for viewing some specific examples of violent or sexual film content. Again, I was looking for differences between parents of minor children and other adult respondents. Six examples of sexual content were combined to form one scale and three examples of violent content were combined to form a separate one. The lowest minimum age mean (12.65) and the highest (17.64) reflect the age distinction made by the MPAA's ratings. The only numbers that appear in MPAA ratings are PG-13 and NC-17, and seventeen is the minimum age a person must be for admittance into an R-rated film without a parent or guardian. Interestingly, the mean for the minimum age children should be to view portrayals of oral sex was higher (17.64) than that of sexual intercourse (17.05). In addition to being the only two examples of content with a minimum age mean over seventeen years old, this result may point to a perception of oral sex as more deviant than sexual intercourse. Like the phrase "graphic sex" that appeared in the offensiveness statement, respondents may have thought about pornography in response to these two questions, despite the use of the phrase "current hit movie" that preceded both types of content. After pretesting the minimum age questions, it became apparent that a "never" category had to be added to them for respondents who said "never" or gave minimum age limits over 21 years old.

In addition to the way respondents' minimum age limits for various types of violent or sexual film content coincided with the MPAA's ratings (and the thinking of the parents who make film rating decisions), another interesting result emerged. The age that many adults believe children *should be* in order to view the examples of film content provided in the questionnaire (and often found in R-, or PG-13-rated movies) is not very close to the actual ages of children watching movies that contain sex and violence, be it PG-rated films in the theater or R-rated films on videocassette (Sparks, 1986b; Greenberg, et al., 1989). The largest discrepancies between respondents' minimum age limits and teenagers' exposure was in terms of sexual content. Respondents set some of the highest minimum age limits on R-rated sexual material, the same kind of material in movies that 92% of 13 to 15-year-olds report having already seen (Bryant, 1985).

While the minimum age questions emphasized a disparity between what adults believe children should see and what they do see, especially in terms of sexual content, the imitation statements, on the other hand, showed some similarity between adult respondents and children. Adult respondents believe children imitate movie sex; 14 to 17-year-olds consider media the second most important source of sexual information (Greenberg, et al., 1993). Although movies were not the only form of media considered in this study, adults and teenagers both consider movie sex instructional. And, some of teenagers' favorite R-rated films contain as many as 15 sexual intercourse "learning experiences" (Greenberg, et al., 1993).

There are a few considerations that should be taken into account for future work in this area. First, if another survey were to be conducted, I would use the word "fear" in the imitation statements. Second, I would make it clear that the use of the word "graphic" to describe movie sex and examples of sexual content do not refer to pornography. Finally, an area that is not addressed in this study but is certainly an important consideration is film content that contains both sex and violence. Content of this kind is perhaps the most universally agreed upon as having the most negative effects on children.

I believe an experiment would be an ideal approach to gain insight into how people relate what they see to various MPAA film ratings. Instead of describing various types of content in words and asking people how old someone should be before they see it, showing actual examples of content deemed as too intense for an R rating by the MPAA could be a more valid approach to this area of research.

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Table 1. Percentages for categorical variables parent, parent of minor children and viewing of various types of violent or sexual film content by children, (N=368).

Variables	%
Parent	
Yes	74.2
No	25.8
	100.00%
Parent of minor children	
Yes	36.7
No	63.3
	100.00%
Should children view:*	
Murder without bloodshed?	
Yes	92.9% (N=354)
A woman's bare breast in a non-sexual context?	
Yes	88.0% (N=346)
A male and female character fondling each other without clothing?	
Yes	85.6% (N=350)
Full frontal female nudity in a non-sexual context?	
Yes	80.2% (N=343)
Murder with bloodshed?	
Yes	79.1% (N=350)
Portrayals of sexual intercourse?	
Yes	77.7% (N=346)
Full frontal male nudity in a non-sexual context?	
Yes	77.4% (N=344)
Torture or mutilation?	
Yes	68.8% (N=350)
Portrayals of oral sex?	
Yes	67.9% (N=345)

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*For these variables, responses of 21 or a lower age are coded as "Yes" responses. "Never" or age responses over 21 are coded as "No" responses. "Don't know" or "refused" responses are coded as missing data. "Yes" and "No" responses add up to 100%.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for offensiveness to film sex and violence variables and imitation of film sex and violence variables.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
I am offended by graphic sex in films.*	3.53	1.20	366
I am offended by graphic violence in films.*	3.49	1.24	366
Children are likely to imitate the sex they see in films.*	3.76	1.00	366
Children are likely to imitate the violence they see in films.*	3.99	.96	366

*Responses coded: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for minimum age at which children should be allowed to view various types of film content.

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
How old do you think a child should be before viewing a current hit movie containing:			
Murder without bloodshed.*	12.65	3.41	342
A woman's bare breast in a non-sexual context.*	13.74	3.95	324
Full frontal female nudity in a non-sexual context.*	15.57	3.95	324
Murder with bloodshed.*	15.74	2.75	291
Full frontal male nudity in a non-sexual context.*	15.74	3.36	285
Male and female characters fondling each other without clothing.*	16.44	2.38	315
Torture or mutilation.*	16.64	2.46	253
Portrayals of sexual intercourse.*	17.05	2.25	286
Portrayals of oral sex.*	17.64	2.16	250
Violent content scale.**	14.87	2.37	243
Sexual content scale.***	15.95	2.37	229

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*Responses coded in number of years up to the age of 21.

**Scale is the average of age responses for the murder without bloodshed, murder with bloodshed and torture or mutilation variables and is coded in number of years up to the age of 21.

***Scale is the average of age responses for the women's bare breast in nonsexual context, full frontal female nudity in nonsexual context, full frontal male nudity in nonsexual context, fondling without clothing, portrayals of sexual intercourse and portrayals of oral sex variables and is coded in number of years up to the age of 21.

Table 4. Correlated t-tests for all adult respondents' offensiveness and imitation variables.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	t value	df	signif.
I am offended by graphic sex in movies.*	3.53	1.20	.82	364	ns
I am offended by graphic violence in movies.*	3.49	1.24			
Children are likely to imitate the sex they see in movies.*	3.76	1.00	4.97	363	p<.000
Children are likely to imitate the violence they see in movies.*	3.99	.97			
I am offended by graphic sex in movies.*	3.53	1.20	3.53	363	p<.001
Children are likely to imitate the sex they see in movies.*	3.76	1.00			
I am offended by graphic violence in movies.*	3.49	1.24	7.95	363	p<.000
Children are likely to imitate the violence they see in movies.*	3.99	.97			

*Responses were coded: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree.

Table 5. Correlated t-tests for offensiveness and imitation variables, for parents with minor children only.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	t value	df	significance
I am offended by graphic sex in movies.*	3.45	1.24	1.09	134	ns
I am offended by graphic violence in movies.*	3.36	1.25			
Children are likelyto imitate the sex they see in movies.*	3.69	1.07	4.39	133	p<.000
Children are likely to imitate the violence they see in movies.*	4.00	.98			
I am offended by graphic sex in movies.*	3.45	1.24	2.25	134	p<.05
Children are likely to imitate the sex they see in movies.*	3.69	1.06			
I am offended by graphic violence in movies.*	3.37	1.25	5.99	133	p<.000
Children are likely to imitate the violence they see in movies.*	4.00	.98			

*Responses were coded: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree.

Table 6. Independent t-tests for imitation of movie sex and violence and offensiveness of movie sex and violence by parental status, means and standard deviations.

	Do you have any children Under the age of 18?				
Variables	Yes Means (&SD) (N=135)	No Means (&SD) (N=233)	t value	df	signif.
I am offended by graphic sex in films.*	3.45 (1.24)	3.58 (1.18)	.95	364	ns
I am offended by graphic violence in films.*	3.36 (1.25)	3.56 (1.22)	1.46	364	ns
Children are likely to imitate the sex they see in films.*	3.69 (1.06)	3.80 (.96)	1.03	364	ns
Children are likely to imitate the violence they see in in films.*	4.00 (.98)	3.98 (.95)	.16	364	ns

*Responses were coded: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree.

Table 7. Independent t-test for sexual content age scale and violent content age scale by parental status, means and standard deviations.

	Do you have any children Under the age of 18?				
Variables	Yes Means (SD) (N)	No Means (SD) (N)	t value	df	significance
Sexual content variables scale.*	16.14 (2.06) (102)	15.79 (2.59) (127)	1.10	227	ns
Violent content variables scale.**	14.78 (2.34) (109)	14.95 (2.40) (134)	.55	241	ns

*Scale is the average of age responses for the women's bare breast in nonsexual context, full frontal female nudity in nonsexual context, full frontal male nudity in nonsexual context, fondling without clothing, portrayals of sexual intercourse and portrayals of oral sex variables and is coded in number of years up to the age of 21.

**Scale is the average of age responses for the murder without bloodshed, murder with bloodshed and torture or mutilation variables and is coded in number of years up to the age of 21.

Table 8. Pearson correlation coefficients for parental status, offensiveness, imitation and age limit variables.

Variables	2	3	4	5	6
1. Imitation of movie sex*	.60[c] (364)	.39[c] (364)	.37[c] (364)	.28[c] (229)	.29[c] (243)
2. Imitation of movie violence*	—	.39[c] (365)	.43[c] (364)	.23[c] (229)	.31[c] (243)
3. Movie sex offensiveness*		—	.70[c] (365)	.30[c] (229)	.27[c] (242)
4. Movie violence offensiveness*			—	.19[b] (229)	.32[c] (209)
5. Film sexual content age limits**				—	.77[c] (209)
6. Film violent content age limits***					—

---

*Responses were coded: 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree.

**Average of minimum age limits for various types of violent content.

***Average of minimum age limits for various types of sexual content.

---

[a] $p<.05$
[b] $p<.01$
[c] $p<.001$

Table 9. Hierarchical regression analysis of demographic variables, parental status, offensiveness to movie violence and sex, and imitation of movie violence and sex on minimum age limits for violent content.

Blocks of independent variables	Std. beta	R-square change	Total R-square	Adjusted R-square
1. Demographic variables				
-- Age	.10			
-- Gender (female=1)	.03			
-- Income	$-.15^{a}$			
-- Education	.06	.03	.03	.01
2. Parental status				
-- Parent of minor (yes=1)	.00	.00	.03	.01
3. Offended by variables				
-- Graphic movie sex	.09			
-- Graphic movie violence	$.30^{c}$	$.10^{c}$	$.13^{c}$	$.10^{c}$
4. Imitation variables				
-- Movie sex by children	.04			
-- Movie violence by children	$.21^{a}$	$.04^{b}$	$.17^{c}$	$.14^{c}$

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[a] $p<.05$

[b] $p<.01$

[c] $p<.001$

Table 10. Hierarchical regression analysis of demographic variables, parental status, offensiveness to movie violence and sex, and imitation of movie violence and sex on minimum age limits for sexual content.

Blocks of independent variables	Std. beta	R-square change	Total R-square	Adjusted R-square
1. Demographic variables				
-- Age	.05			
-- Gender (female=1)	.04			
-- Income	-.10			
-- Education	.00	.01	.01	-.01
2. Parental status				
-- Parent of minor (yes=1)	.13	.01	.03	.00
3. Offended by variables				
-- Graphic movie sex	.34[c]			
-- Graphic movie violence	.05	.11[c]	.14[c]	.11[c]
4. Imitation variables				
-- Movie sex by children	.18[a]			
-- Movie violence by children	.07	.04[a]	.18[c]	.14[c]

---

[a] p<.05
[b] p<.01
[c] p<.001

Appendix A

The following are four Likert scale questions relevant to this study. Two refer to adults' offensiveness to sexual or violent movie content and two refer to adults' belief that children imitate sexual or violent movie content:

Now I'd like to read you some statements about movies and television. Please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree.

I am offended by graphic violence in movies. ____

<5> Strongly agree
<4> Agree
<3> Neutral
<2> Disagree
<1> Strongly disagree

<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> REFUSED

Children are likely to imitate the **violent** acts they see in movies.

<5> Strongly agree
<4> Agree ____
<3> Neutral
<2> Disagree
<1> Strongly disagree

<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> REFUSED

I am offended by graphic sex in movies. ____

<5> Strongly agree
<4> Agree
<3> Neutral
<2> Disagree
<1> Strongly disagree

<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> REFUSED

Children are likely to imitate the **sexual** acts they see in movies.

<5> Strongly agree
<4> Agree ____
<3> Neutral
<2> Disagree
<1> Strongly disagree

<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> REFUSED

The following questions ask respondents to provide a "minimum age" for various types of movie content. A scale was made, combining similar types of content (three for violent content and six for sexual content):

Now I'm going to return to some questions about movies.

How old do you think children should be before they can see a current hit movie containing...

Murder **without** bloodshed, for example, a character is shot and dies, but no blood is shown?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

A woman's bare breast in a non-sexual context, for example, taking a shower?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

How old do you think children should be before they can see a current hit movie containing a male and female character fondling each other **without** clothing?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

Murder **with** bloodshed, for example, a character's throat is cut and we see the blood?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

Full frontal female nudity in a non-sexual context, for example, taking a shower?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

How old do you think children should be before they can see a current hit movie containing portrayals of sexual intercourse?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

If the respondent seems confused about the type of portrayal the question refers to, say: "Portrayals of simulated sexual intercourse found in current hit movies."

Torture or mutilation with bloodshed, for example, a character's finger is cut off?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

Full frontal male nudity in a non-sexual context, for example, taking a shower?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

How old do you think children should be before they can see a current hit movie containing portrayals of oral sex?

[CODE ANSWER IN YEARS:]__________ _____

<777> NEVER
<888> DON'T KNOW
<999> REFUSED

If the respondent seems confused about the type of portrayal the question refers to, say: "Portrayals of simulated oral sex found in current hit movies."

Finally, three demographic questions were directly related to this study:

Are you a parent? _____

<1> YES
<0> NO

<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> REFUSED

Are any of your children under the age of 18? ____

<1> YES
<0> NO

<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> REFUSED

Are any of your children aged 12 to 17? ____

<1> YES
<0> NO

<8> DON'T KNOW
<9> REFUSED

Using is Believing: The Influence of Reliance on the Credibility of Online Political Information

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Using is Believing: The Influence of Reliance on the Credibility of Online Political Information

This study surveyed politically interested Web users online to investigate the degree to which reliance on traditional and online sources predicts credibility of online newspapers, television news, newsmagazines, candidate literature and political issue-oriented sites after controlling for demographic and political factors. Reliance on online and traditional media was the strongest predictor of credibility of online sources. Reliance on traditional media tended to be a stronger predictor of credibility of its online counterpart than reliance on the Web in general.

Using is Believing: The Influence of Reliance on the Credibility of Online Political Information

U.S. forces mobilize for a possible missile attack by China. African-Americans' voting rights will expire in 2007. TWA Flight 800 was shot down by a U.S. military missile. Two 18-year-old virgin honor roll students pledge to share their "first time" online. All four of these rumors and hoaxes debuted on the Internet and found their way into the traditional media.[1] The proliferation of misinformation and pranks pervading the Internet has caused some to call the Internet's credibility into question[2] and to fear whether the growth of the Internet will further drive down credibility ratings of traditional media.[3] Others argue that the perceived credibility gap between traditional and online media exceeds any real differences,[4] an argument that seems to be supported by previous studies[5] and polling data.[6]

Credibility is a particularly crucial concern for the Internet. If people do not trust or believe what they see or read from a source, they are less likely to pay attention to it,[7] which may keep the Internet from becoming a main source of news and information in the near future.

While observers continue to argue whether or not the Internet should be judged as credible, few scholars have gone beyond this argument to examine what factors might influence whether online information is perceived as credible

This study surveyed politically interested Web users online to investigate the degree to which reliance on traditional and online sources predicts credibility of online newspapers, television news, newsmagazines, candidate literature and political issue-oriented sites after controlling for demographic and political factors.

Literature Review

Media Credibility

Widespread concern that the public no longer trusted the media spurred a host of studies in the mid-to-late 1980s examining media credibility,[8] a concern that disappeared after esteem for the media rose during the Persian Gulf war[9] and after studies suggested that the credibility crisis itself lacked credibility—that is, the public held a largely favorable view of the media.[10] But media credibility has received renewed attention in recent years as polls suggest that confidence in the media has dropped precipitously in the 1990s, igniting fears that "the old style gatekeeper breed of journalist could be poised to follow the slide rule and buggy whip into oblivion."[11] For instance, a Pew Research Center study found that the number of people who judge the media as immoral tripled from 1985-1999 (13 to 38 percent) and the percentage of those who believe the media hinder rather than help democracy climbed from 23 to 38 percent. The public is also more likely to judge the media as unprofessional, overly critical and uncaring about the people they cover than they were 15 years ago.[12] This echoes other studies that have found that from 1985 to the mid 1990s the number of individuals who judged negativity, bias and being manipulated by special interests as major problems in media coverage has increased.[13]

Several media observers blame the Internet for some of the decline in media credibility. They note that an assumed strength of the Internet—that it is a freewheeling, unregulated outpost for anyone to express his or her opinions—might also weaken its value as a credible information source. Anyone can post a Web page. While traditional news sources, and their online counterparts, are subject to both professional and social pressures to provide accurate and unbiased information, such constraints do not exist for the Internet.[14] Worse, several parody sites have cropped up on the Web which look like ones posted by official sources, and even the mainstream press has been taken in by online hoaxes.[15] For instance, the *New York Times* and several other news organizations published a story in late 1998 about American movie titles supposedly translated into other languages (e.g. "Field of Dreams" was supposedly "Imaginary Dead Baseball Players Live in My Cornfield" in Cantonese) that was taken from a spoof Internet site.[16] Finally, Web media operate on a 24-hour deadline so they are more apt to report rumor that traditionally-delivered media might take time to check such as when an Associated Press reporter posted on its Web site that comedian Bob Hope had died.[17] Consequently, some media observers question the Internet as a reliable source and lump it in with infotainment content that is sullying the reputation of traditional media like "'Geraldo' and 'Hard Copy,' supermarket tabloids, Washington's shouting experts on weekend television, talk-radio know it alls, gossip mongers on the Internet, Paparazzi."[18]

However, media experts contend that the credibility gap that is perceived to exist between online and traditionally delivered news exceeds any real differences between the two types of news organizations.[19] Indeed, most studies suggest the public rates Internet information as equally or more credible than traditional sources.

Johnson and Kaye,[20] in an online survey of politically interested Web users, found that in general Internet users judged online sources as only "somewhat credible" with online political issue-oriented sites the most believable and online candidate literature ones the least so. However, online newspapers and political issue-oriented sites were rated as more believable than their traditionally delivered counterparts, while credibility scores differed little for online and traditional newsmagazines and candidate literature. Amount of reliance on a source correlated with its degree of credibility, particularly for traditional news sources.

Another researcher created a Web page containing information on candidates running for Congress and asked his students to judge whether the information on the Web page was more or less in-depth and biased than similar televised information. Almost three-quarters (71 percent) judged the Web page more in-depth than television. While a slight majority (54.5%) said the Web page was just as biased as television, 43.3% said it was less biased.[21] Similarly, a study by the Pew Research Center also found that online users rated the Internet as a more credible source than traditional media. Almost half (49 percent) agreed that "these days you're more likely to find accurate information about what's going on from the Internet than in the daily newspapers or on the network news,"[22] down from 56 percent in a similar poll conducted in 1996.[23] Most Americans (55 percent), however, do not think that news organization's Web sites are any more or less accurate than their traditional versions. Jupiter Communications found more compelling results. Their study discovered that more than 80 percent of Internet users believe news reported on the Internet is a trustworthy as traditionally delivered sources.[24] While the Jupiter Communication poll indicated 7 percent judged Internet news more reliable than broadcast or print news, a UPI Technology study found that 34 percent of computer users place somewhat more trust and confidence in the accuracy of Internet information over other sources.[25]

Not all studies have found that Internet news sites have garnered high credibility ratings. A Roper study for the Freedom Forum found that people rated leading traditional sources as more fair and unbiased than Internet information. While three-quarters claimed they trust CNN and six in ten had confidence in the *New York Times*, slightly more than half (54%) of those surveyed trusted the Internet to deliver fair and unbiased information about the presidential campaign. However, people put more faith in the Internet than in their local newspapers (52%).[26] Similarly a Gallup poll found that 45 percent said they cannot trust information on the Internet, far below broadcast news sources.[27]

Credibility and Media Use

Past studies suggest that how credible one views a medium is strongly related to how often one relies on it,[28] with relationships proving stronger for reliance measures than general use ones because media use taps behaviors while reliance measures examine attitudes toward individual media.[29] Similarly, research suggests that people judge their preferred medium as the most credible.[30] Therefore, most studies find that television, the most relied upon source, is also judged the most credible.[31] While television clearly dominates the Internet as a source of political information, Americans are increasingly relying on the Internet for news, particularly for breaking news. For instance, Jupiter Communications found that almost half of online users turn to Internet news sources for quick headlines and details[32] while respondents to a 1998 UPI Technology Survey predicted that the Net would eclipse newspapers as a source of daily news within five years.[33]

Internet studies also suggest that how credible people judge the medium depends on how often they use it. Johnson and Kaye[34] found that reliance on the Web for political information was correlated with how credible they judged online newspapers, newsmagazines, online candidate literature and issue-oriented sources. However, hours per week on the Web and on political sites in particular, as well as the number of times the Web has been accessed, were unrelated to media credibility. Similarly, the Pew Research Center found that while 55 percent of Americans in general rated the Internet as accurate as traditional ones, 69 percent of Internet users considered it as equally credible.[35]

Heavy media use in general may be connected to Internet credibility. Studies suggest that Web use seems to supplement rather than replace traditional news sources.[36] For instance, the Pew Research Center found that while 63 percent rely on traditionally delivered sources to the same degree since going online, 16 percent said they now use traditional sources more. Also, those who rely on the Internet for political information tend to be "political junkies" who watch CNN, Sunday public affairs programs and C-SPAN as well as read more newsmagazines and political books than the average individual.[37] Because heavy users tend to judge the traditional media as more credible, they may also see the Internet as more believable than light users.

Media credibility and political attitudes

No studies could be found that have examined the connection between online credibility and political attitudes. However, several scholars have investigated the link between Internet use and political attitudes. These studies have shattered the myth that the Internet is "a haven for isolated geeks" who only emerge from their "cavelike bedrooms" to express an interest in politics when freedom on the Internet is threatened.[38] The Netizen does not appear to be disconnected and apathetic. Rather, studies indicate that in many ways Web users appear to be model citizens. Internet users are more politically knowledgeable than the average citizen.[39] For instance, they are twice as likely as the nonInternet user to be able to name William Rehnquist as the chief justice of the United States.[40] In addition, Web users are politically interested and active,[41] report high levels of political efficacy,[42] are more likely to vote[43] and more likely to seek out information from the media[44] than the general public. Politically active Internet users score higher on these measures than general users.[45] While studies suggest that Democrats and Republicans use the Internet in about equal proportions[46] and that at least a quarter of Web users are Libertarian,[47] the number of Web users who identify themselves as liberals outnumber those who consider themselves as conservatives.[48] Finally, a greater percentage of the digitally connected express confidence in democracy than those who do not go online (57-42 percent). As *Wired* political analyst Jon Katz noted, "Digital Citizens appear startlingly close to the Jeffersonian ideal—they are informed, outspoken, participatory, passionate about freedom, proud of their culture, and committed to the free nation in which it has evolved."[49]

But while Internet users may appear to be politically engaged citizens who believe they have the power to influence government, they do not necessarily trust the government to carry policies out. Internet users report high levels of political distrust.[50]

Furthermore, not all studies have found that Internet use predicts political attitudes and behaviors. While Internet use for political information may be linked to political interest, several studies suggest in it not related to intent to vote[51] or to political knowledge.[52] For instance, Johnson and associates found that using the Internet for political information tended to be *negatively* related to political knowledge.[53] Also differences between Internet use and political attitudes sometimes disappear after controlling for other variables.[54]

Credibility and Demographics

Past media credibility studies suggest that males, and those with high levels of education, income and media use tend to be the most critical of the media in general.[55] A similar pattern has been found for the Internet. Johnson and Kaye[56] discovered that young, less educated females were most likely to judge various online media as the most credible. Paradoxically, those who are more likely to judge the Internet as believable are the least likely to go online. Internet studies suggest that while the portrait of the Information Superhighway is increasingly looking like the general population,[57] the Internet is still dominated by white males of high socioeconomic status.[58] Therefore, several demographic characteristics associated with high use of the Internet are also related to negative perceptions of credibility.

Research Question

This study of what factors influence credibility of online sources examines three main questions:

1. To what degree will individuals who regularly rely on the Internet for political information judge online newspapers, online television news, newsmagazines, candidate literature and issue-oriented sources as credible after controlling for demographics and political attitudes?

2. To what degree will individuals who regularly rely on traditionally delivered sources for political information judge online newspapers, online television news, newsmagazines, candidate literature and issue-oriented sources as credible after controlling for demographics and political attitudes?

3. Which will be a stronger predictor of credibility of online sources: online or traditionally delivered sources?

Method

Data Collection

This study examines how reliance on traditional media and online sources influence perceptions of credibility of Internet sources after controlling for demographic and political factors. To reach politically interested Internet users, a survey was posted on the World Wide Web during the two weeks before and the two weeks after the 1996 presidential election (October 23-November 20, 1996). Additionally, links were established to the survey from other politically oriented Web sites and notices were sent to media and politically-oriented discussion groups, forums, Usenet groups and listservs informing them of the survey. The intent was not to generate a random sample,[59] but to attract politically interested Web users—those who would be more likely to use online media sources. A total of 308 individuals completed the survey during the four-week period. While this is a convenience sample, demographic comparisons with other online surveys, as well as with ones conducted by the traditional method of random telephone calls, suggest the sample may be representative of the Internet population.[60]

Dependent Measures

While credibility is typically defined in terms of worthiness of being believed,[61] it is typically measured as a multidimensional construct. Media credibility has been measured several ways, and studies suggest that how credibility is measured influences the degree to which individuals judge the media as credible.[62] Believability, accuracy, bias and depth or completeness are four measures that have consistently emerged from several past studies that have examined how media credibility should be gauged.[63] Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale the degree of believability, fairness, accuracy and depth of each online source (i.e., online newspapers, online television news, newsmagazines, candidate literature and issue-oriented sources). The five-point scale ranged from not at all believable (fair, accurate or in-depth) to very believable (fair, accurate or in-depth), with a "don't know" option. Scores for the four measures of credibility were combined into a credibility index for each online medium. The standardized Cronbach's alpha for the five scales ranged from .83 to .91.

Independent variables

Source reliance: Research on traditional media suggests that credibility is strongly related to how often individuals use that particular medium.[64] Past studies also suggest that reliance is more strongly associated with media credibility than with general use measures.[65] Thus, respondents were asked to judge on a five-point Likert scale: "How much do you rely on the following sources (newspapers, news magazines, television news and the World Wide Web) for your political information?" Responses ranged from "don't rely at all" to "heavily rely on."

Demographics and political attitudes: Past studies suggest that those who are older and have high levels of income and education are the least likely to view the media as credible, and males judge the media as less credible than females.[66] Therefore, this study also employed traditional measures of age, gender, income and education[67] to see if relationships between credibility and demographics typically found for traditionally delivered media hold true for their online counterparts.

Studies suggest that Web users are politically interested and active[68] and report high levels of political efficacy,[69] and that politically active Internet users score higher on these measures than general users.[70] Internet users also report high levels of political distrust.[71] Thus, this study will include the following political measures: campaign interest, political interest, political trust, political efficacy and strength of party support.[72]

Data Analysis

Hierarchical regression was conducted to examine the extent to which reliance on traditional media and the World Wide Web predicts media credibility after controlling for demographics (age, income, gender, education) and political attitudes (strength of party support, political trust, political efficacy, campaign interest and political interest). The predictors were entered as blocks. Demographic variables were entered first, followed by the political attitudes block. Next, the traditional and online media use measures were entered. Only reliance measures directly related to the credibility variables were entered. For instance, for credibility of online newspapers, only reliance on newspapers and on the Web were entered in the third block. Similarly, only television news and newsmagazines were entered with reliance on the Web as blocks in their respective regression equations. This study did not include measures of reliance of traditionally delivered candidate literature and issue-oriented sources. Thus for those regression equations, all the reliance measures (i.e., rely on TV, newspapers, newsmagazines and the Web) were included in the third block.

Results

Profile of Politically Interested Internet Users

Studies indicate that the most relied upon sources are deemed the most credible. Slightly more than one half (51 percent) of the 308 respondents say they rely on or heavily rely on the Web to keep politically up-to-date. Only 3.9% of those surveyed do not rely on the Web for political information. Reliance on traditional media for political information is not as strong as reliance on the Web. Slightly more than four out 10 (46.1%) of the respondents reported that they turn to printed newspapers to keep an eye on politics. About one-quarter of the respondents rely on television news and newsmagazines to find out about politics, 26.9% and 25.0% respectively.

The study also assessed Internet users' political attitudes. Almost 9 out of 10 of those surveyed are politically interested and 91.5% indicated they were interested or highly interested in the 1996 presidential campaign. Additionally, almost two-thirds (65.5%) of the respondents reported strong ties to a political party.

Public trust in politics and in politicians has been on the decline for several decades. Internet supporters tout the medium as a means of boosting trust in the government while others claim that those who distrust the government to begin with are more likely to use the Web. This latter scenario is supported as almost nine out of ten respondents reported low to moderate levels of trust in the government.

The belief that the government ignores citizens' concerns in addition to general feelings of political powerlessness lead to low levels of efficacy. However, many argue that the Internet makes it easy to become involved in the political process, thus heightening feelings of efficacy. This study found that slightly more than nine out of ten Web users reported moderate to high levels of internal efficacy, the belief that each individual has the power to bring about change.

Respondents spend three hours per week (22.7% of their time online) seeking political information and another 10.2 hours on the Web in general. They are also experienced Web users who average 1,723 times online, including eleven people who said they have accessed the Internet more than 10,000 times.

Similar to other surveys, this one suggests that Internet users tend to be young white males with high education and high socioeconomic status. The average age of respondents of this survey is 31.2, and males comprise 75.5 percent of those surveyed. Slightly less than half of the respondents (45.5%) report an annual income between $25,001 - $65,000, six out of ten have a college degree or higher, and almost nine out of ten (88.3%) are white.

Predictors of Credibility on Online Political Sources

Regression analysis reveals that reliance on the Web and traditional media increases perceptions of credibility of online sources. Even after controlling for other variables, reliance on the Web for political information significantly predicts higher levels of credibility of all the online media sources examined. As expected, reliance on traditional media significantly predicts credibility of their online counterparts. Some demographics, interest in politics and interest in the presidential campaign also significantly predict credibility of online sources, though reliance measures tended to be stronger predictors.

Online Television: Perceptions of credibility of the political information found on Web television sources (e.g., CNN.com) are significantly predicted by reliance on traditionally delivered television news, reliance on the Internet in general, campaign interest, and age (Table 1).

Reliance on the Web as a significant predictor of credibility of online television indicates that the Web is being perceived and accepted as a new medium akin to traditional media. Reliance on traditionally-delivered television leads to higher perceptions of credibility of online television just as reliance on traditionally delivered television leads to higher levels of credibility of television. Indeed, reliance on television was a stronger predictor of online credibility than was the Web.

Online television's credibility is significantly predicted by campaign interest. Respondents who were interested in the presidential campaign deem political information found on television sites as very credible. Lastly, perceptions of credibility of the political information found on Internet television sources are significantly predicted by age. Older respondents tend to view online television sources as more credible than younger respondents, which runs counter to most studies which find the young rate the Internet as most credible. Online television is the only online source where age is positively associated with credibility—the other online sources are negatively associated with age.

Online Newspapers: Reliance on the Web, reliance on printed newspapers, campaign interest, gender, and age all predicted credibility of online newspapers (Table 2).

Reliance on the Web is a significant predictor of the credibility of online newspapers, but reliance on traditional newspapers is a stronger one. Consistent with other research, reliance on a particular medium predicts perceptions of credibility of that medium including if it is online, and apparently reliance on the Web also leads to credibility of online sources.

Interest in the presidential campaign was also a significant predictor of online newspaper credibility. The more intensely respondents followed the election the more likely they were to judge the information they found on Web newspapers as credible.

Age is a significant, though negative, predictor of online newspaper's credibility. Younger respondents tend to view online newspapers as more credible than the older respondents. This result is consistent with research that finds that younger people have more readily embraced the Internet as a new medium and thus view online media as more credible than older persons. Gender is also a significant predictor of online newspaper credibility, with more males responding positively to the information they found on Web newspapers.

Online Newsmagazines: Reliance on the Web, reliance on non-Internet newsmagazines and gender are all significant predictors of credibility of online newsmagazines (Table 3). As with the other media examined in this study, reliance on the Web predicted credibility. In the case of newsmagazines, reliance on the Web is just as strong of a predictor as reliance on printed newsmagazines. Gender is also a significant predictor of newsmagazines with males judging political information obtained as more credible than females.

Online Issue Oriented Sources: Reliance on the Web, reliance on television, and political interest predict the credibility of Web sites that provide information on political issues (Table 4). Again, reliance on the Web in general significantly predicts perceptions of online credibility. Respondents who rely on the Web judge online issue oriented sites as credible. Reliance on television news is a significant but negative predictor of credibility. Individuals who do not rely on television news view online issues oriented sources as more credible than Web users who turn to television as a source of political information. Political interest is also a significant predictor of credibility. The Internet tends to attract younger people who view traditional media with a cynical eye and who crave more political information than they get from television's sound bites. This group of politically interested Internet users has shifted from television news to the Web for political information and thus view what they find online as credible.

Online Candidate Literature: Credibility of candidate information that is posted on Web sites is predicted by reliance on the Web and education (Table 5). Reliance on the Web is the only media measure that significantly predicts online candidate literature. Web users who rely on the Web for political information deem sites containing information about the candidates as credible.

Education is negatively associated with online candidate literature. Less educated users are more likely to view sites touting candidate information as more credible. Many online sites devoted to candidates are placed online by the candidate's supporters rather than by a non-partisan entity such as the news media. Educated persons may recognize that the information found on many candidate and issue-oriented sites may be biased in favor of the candidate or issue, while less educated people may not be aware of any bias and thus may view these sites as credible.

Conclusions

This study examined how reliance on traditional and online media influence credibility of online sources after controlling for demographic and political factors.

Past studies suggest that while televison news still clearly dominates as the preferred medium, the public is increasingly relying on the Internet as a source of political news and information.[73] However, among this sample of politically interested Web users, more than half (51 percent) heavily relied on or relied on the Internet as a source of political information followed by newspapers (46.1%). Only about a quarter said they relied on television news for political information. The finding that this politically interested group relies on newspapers rather than television supports previous studies that suggest motivated citizens turn to newspapers rather than television for political news because they are seeking more in-depth information than television can provide.[74]

Although the respondents of this study reported an increasing reliance on the Internet, this does not signal the decline of broadcast and cable news. This study was not conducted among the general public or even general Internet users but rather among politically interested Web users, those who already harbor an interest in political affairs and who are already cruising the Internet for political information.

This study supports past ones that have suggested that credibility is strongly related to how often individuals use a particular medium.[75] Indeed, reliance on both traditional and online media were the strongest predictors of media credibility. Reliance on the Web was the only variable that significantly predicted all five online credibility measures. However, traditional media registered stronger betas than reliance on the Web, at least for the online media measures. This reinforces the findings of other researchers that the Internet supplements rather than replaces online sources.[76] People rely on the traditional media, particularly newspapers, to find out about important events and then they turn to the Internet for more complete and up-to-date information on the subject. Traditional media may have also posted stronger relationships because of the nature of the measures. This study looked at the links between reliance on traditional sources and credibility of their online counterparts. However, it examined how well the Web in general predicted credibility of particular online media. Perhaps if this study had used more refined reliance of online measures (e.g. reliance on online newspapers), the researchers would have discovered stronger relationships between online reliance and credibility.

Past research suggests young, less educated females were most likely to judge various online media as the most credible.[77] This study found few significant relationships between demographics and online credibility although several trends were apparent. Younger individuals, who spend the most time on the Internet, tend to view it as more credible. Similarly, the less educated tend to view online sources as more credible, which reinforces earlier studies that highly educated individuals are more critical of the media. However, this study found males were more likely than women to judge online newspapers and newsmagazines as more credible. While this runs counter to previous online media studies, it supports earlier research on traditional media that finds men judge newspapers and women rate television as the most credible medium.[78]

Campaign interest significantly predicted credibility of online newspapers and television news, while political interest was linked to credibility of online issue sources. Past studies suggest that people go online for three main reasons: to get access to information that is not available anywhere else, to be able to search many different news sources for a topic and because of the convenience of getting news online.[79] Political observers note media coverage in recent elections has focused less on campaign issues and more on peripheral concerns such as polls, campaign strategy and scandals.[80] The Internet allows the public to bypass the traditional media. Also, the sheer volume of campaign information available on the Net through candidate Web sites, nonpartisan sites such as PoliticsNow and online versions of traditional media allow voters to readily compare candidates' stances on issues and determine how issues will directly affect them.[81]

While television serves up its news in 22-minute segments, at specific times and through the filter of the reporter or anchor, the Internet provides the public a theoretically limitless newshole of up-to-date information available when the public wants it—much of it raw form that has not been digested by journalists. As *Washington Post* reporter Howard Kurtz[82] notes, "The new venues will give ordinary folks the ability to search voting records, election returns, exit polls, speech and position papers, enabling them to cut through the political fog by downloading the facts for themselves." Therefore, those interested in the campaign may judge online information as credible because they can get the information they want from a wide variety of places when they want it and without having that information go through the filter of the media.

Some critics question whether the Internet could ever be considered a credible source of political information, lumping it in with infotainment content like "Hard Copy," supermarket tabloids and television talk show hosts.[83] Because anyone can post a Web page, there are no guarantees that the information found there is unbiased and accurate. Indeed, the Internet is replete with parody sites and online rumors and hoaxes. Even online versions of traditional media are not exempt from criticism because Web media operate on a 24-hour deadline so online journalists are more apt to report unsubstantiated rumors.[84] This lack of perceived credibility, critics argue, may hinder the Internet from ever becoming a major source of political information.

This study, however, finds that concerns that the Internet may never be judged as a credible source are overblown. The core of politically interested Web users surveyed for this study judged the Web as the most credible source. More importantly, those who relied on it more rated it as more credible. As people increasingly turn to the Internet because of its convenience and wide availability of news, and as they become increasingly savvy about which online sources to question and which ones to believe, credibility ratings are bound to rise.

This study examined the influence of media reliance on credibility among those who regularly rely on the Internet for political information. Future studies should be conducted among the general population to determine the degree to which the Web is perceived as credible and whether amount of reliance remains the major determinant of online credibility.

TABLE 1

Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Credibility Online Television

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Gender	-.04	-.01	-.03
Age	.17*	.15*	.18*
Education	-.10	-.06	-.08
Income	-.08	-.11	-.09
Efficacy		.01	-.02
Strength		-.06	-.05
Trust		-.05	-.04
Political Interest		.03	.02
Campaign Interest		.20*	.17*
Rely on TV			.21**
Rely on Newspapers			.-----
Rely on News magazines			.----
Rely on Web			.18**
R^2	.03	.06	.13
Adjusted R^2	.01	.03	.09
R^2 Change	.03	.03	.07
Sig. of Change	.162	.077	.000

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TABLE 2
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Credibility
Online Newspapers

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Gender	.14*	.14	.15*
Age	-.18*	-.21**	-.17*
Education	.01	.05	.02
Income	-.03	-.06	-.09
Efficacy		-.02	-.05
Strength		.02	.01
Trust		.00	-.02
Political Interest		.01	-.02
Campaign Interest		.22**	.20**
Rely on TV			.-----
Rely on Newspapers			.28***
Rely on News magazines			.-----
Rely on Web			.17*
R^2	.06	.11	.20
Adjusted R^2	.04	.07	.16
R^2 Change	.06	.05	.09
Sig. of Change	.015	.006	.000

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TABLE 3
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Credibility Online Newsmagazines

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Gender	.18*	.14	.18*
Age	-.20*	-.19*	-.13
Education	-.08	-.07	-.07
Income	.02	.02	.02
Efficacy		.03	-.01
Strength		-.04	-.04
Trust		.16	.15
Political Interest		-.10	-.14
Campaign Interest		.09	.09
Rely on TV			.----
Rely on Newspapers			.----
Rely on News magazines			.28**
Rely on Web			.25**
R^2	.08	.13	.25
Adjusted R^2	.06	.07	.18
R^2 Change	.08	.05	.12
Sig. of Change	.017	.029	.000

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TABLE 4
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Credibility Online Issue Oriented Sources

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Gender	.13	.12	.11
Age	-.07	-.09	-.09
Education	-.23**	-.22**	-.14
Income	.07	.07	.08
Efficacy		-.02	-.01
Strength		.13	.12
Trust		-.05	-.02
Political Interest		.18*	.15*
Campaign Interest		-.05	-.05
Rely on TV			-.17*
Rely on Newspapers			-.06
Rely on News magazines			.02
Rely on Web			.17*
R^2	.09	.13	.19
Adjusted R^2	.06	.07	.12
R^2 Change	.09	.04	.06
Sig. of Change	.006	.009	.001

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TABLE 5
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Predictors of Credibility Online Candidate Literature

Predictor Variables	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Gender	.15*	.13	.12
Age	-.06	-.11	-.11
Education	.29***	-.26***	-.21**
Income	-.08	-.08	-.06
Efficacy		.12	.12
Strength		.13	.13
Trust		.03	.03
Political Interest		-.01	-.04
Campaign Interest		.08	.08
Rely on TV			.02
Rely on Newspapers			-.06
Rely on News magazines			-.01
Rely on Web			.17*
R^2	.15	.20	.23
Adjusted R^2	.13	.16	.17
R^2 Change	.15	.05	.03
Sig. of Change	.000	.000	.000

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

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2. Paul Starobin, "On the Square," *National Journal,* 25 May, 1996, 1145-1149; Andrew Calabrese and Mark Borchert, "Prospects for Electronic Democracy in the United States: Rethinking Communication and Social Policy," *Media, Culture and Society* 18 (1996): 249-268. David Shenk, *Data Smog: Surviving the Information Glut* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); Gary W. Selnow, *Electronic Whistle-stops: The Impact of the Internet on American Politics* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1998), 108-109;Rita Kirk Whillock, "Cyber-Politics: The Online Strategies of '96," *American Behavioral Scientist* 40 (August 1997):1208-1225.

3. Julia Keller, "Their Mission is Clearing Webs on Cyberspace," *Chicago Tribune,* available at www.mercurycenter.com, December 15, 1998; Stephen Hess, "Credibility: Does it Drive the Bottom Line?, *Presstime*, August 1998, available at www.naa.org/presstime/9807/cred.html

4. Amy Gahran, ""Credibility in Online Media: Seven Voices from the News Business," *CONTENTIOUS*, available at http://www.contentious/com/articles/1-3/qa1-3/qa1-3.html

5. Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye, "Cruising is Believing? Comparing Media and Traditional Sources on Media Credibility Measures," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 75 (Summer 1998): 325-340; Dwight J. Brady, "Cyberdemocracy and Perceptions of Politics: An Experimental Analysis of Political Communication on the World Wide Web," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research, Chicago, 1996.

6. The Pew Research Center, "The Internet News Audience Goes Ordinary: Online Newcomers More Middle-Brow, Less Work Oriented," available at www.people-press.org/tech98mor.htm; Jupiter Communications, "80 Percent of Consumers Trust Online News as Much as Offline," November 19, 1998, available at http://www.jup.com/jupiter/press/releases/1998/1119a.html.

7. Cecilie Gaziano, "How Credible is the Credibility Crisis?" *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (summer 1988): 267-278, 375.

8. American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Newspaper Credibility: Building Reader Trust,* conducted by MORI Research Inc., 1985; Times Mirror, *The People & the Press: A Time Mirror Investigation of Public Attitudes Toward the News Media*, conducted by Gallup in collaboration with Michael J. Robinson (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Company, 1986); *The People and the Press: Part 5*, conducted by the Gallup Organization (Washington, D.C.: Times Mirror Company, 1989); *The People and the Press: Part 3* (Los Angeles: Times Mirror Company, 1987); D. Charles Whitney, *The Media and the People: Soundings from Two Communities* (New York: Gannett Center for Media Studies, Columbia University, 1985); David Shaw, "Public and the Press—Two Viewpoints," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 August, 1985, sec. A, pp. 1, 12-13; Associated Press Managing Editors Association, *Journalists and Readers: Bridging the Credibility Gap*, conducted by MORI Research, Inc. (San Bernardino, CA: The Sun, October 1985); William Schneider and I.A. Lewis, "Views on the News," *Public Opinion*, August-

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September 1985, 6-11, 58-59; Ralph S. Izard, "Public Confidence in the News Media," *Journalism Quarterly* 62 (spring 1985): 247-255.

9. Gannett Foundation, *The Media at War: The Press and the Persian Gulf Conflict* (New York: Gannet Foundation Media Center), 84-95.

10. Gaziano, "How Credible is the Credibility Crisis?"; Times Mirror, *The People & the Press*, 1986.

11. Frank Newport and Lydia Saad, "A Matter of Trust," *AJR Newslink*, July/August 1998, available at ajr.newslink.org/ajrgallup98.html.

12. The Pew Research Center, "Public Votes for Continuity and Change; Big Doubts About News Media's Values," February 1999, available at www.people-press.org/Feb99rpt.htm.

13. American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Examining our Credibility: Why Newspaper Credibility Has Been Dropping*, available at www.asne.org/works/jcp/executivesummary.htm; Freedom Forum, "News Junkies, News Critics: How Americans Use the News and What They Think About it," available at www.newseum.org/survey/summary.html; Pew Research Center, "Fewer Favor Press Scrutiny of Political Leaders: Press 'Unfair, Inaccurate and Pushy,'" available at http://www.people-press.org/97medmor.htm.

14. Starobin, "On the Square"; Calabrese and Borchert, "Prospects for Electronic Democracy in the United States."

15. Shenk, *Data Smog*; Selnow, *Electronic Whistle-stops*; Whillock, "Cyber-Politics."

16. Keller, "Their Mission is Clearing Webs on Cyberspace."

17. Keller, "Their Mission is Clearing Webs on Cyberspace,"

18. Hess, "Credibility."

19. Gahran, ""Credibility in Online Media."

20. Johnson and Kaye, "Cruising is Believing?"

21. Brady, "Cyberdemocracy and Perceptions of Politics."

22. The Pew Research Center, "The Internet News Audience Goes Ordinary."

23. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "One-in-Ten Voters Online for Campaign '96," available at http://www.people-press.org/tech96-1.htm, November 1996.

24 Jupiter Communications, "80 Percent of Consumers Trust Online News."

25. Kelvin Childs, "Net to Eclipse Papers in Five Years?" *Editor & Publisher*, May 9, 1998, 26-27.

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26. John W. Mashek with Lawrence T. McGill and Adam Clayton Powell III, *Lethargy '96: How the Media Covered a Listless Campaign* (Arlington, VA: The Freedom Forum).

It should be noted, however, that these responses were among those who used the medium and felt comfortable enough to rate it on fairness and bias. Roper found that 70% did not use the Internet and another 16% did not know if it was fair and unbiased. Therefore, the 54% fairness rating was based on the 14% of the survey who used the Internet and expressed an opinion on it. Also, while this study found that the public rated local media lower than national ones, some studies find the opposite to be true (Andrew Kohut and Robert C. Toth, "The Central Conundrum: How Can the People Like What They Distrust?," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 3 [Winter 1998]: 110-117).

27. Gallup Organization, "Trust in News Media Holds Steady Despite Controversy," cited in GomdaWeb, "Perceptions of Reliability," available at http://www.stanford.edu/class/comm217/reliability/perception.

28. Wayne Wanta and Yu-Wei Hu, "The Effects of Credibility, Reliance, and Exposure on Media Agenda-Setting: A Path Analysis Model," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (spring 1994): 90-98; Bruce H. Westley and Werner J. Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 41 (summer 1964): 325-35; Bradley S. Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability: Some Multiple Correlates," *Journalism Quarterly* 43 (winter 1966): 665-70, 732; American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Building Reader Trust.*

29. Tony Rimmer and David Weaver, "Different Questions, Different Answers? Media Use and Media Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 64 (spring 1987): 28-36, 44.

30. Rimmer and Weaver, "Different Questions, Different Answers? ; Richard F. Carter and Bradley S. Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television: Which Do You Believe?," *Journalism Quarterly* 42 (winter 1965): 29-34.

But while people judge their preferred medium as more credible, it does not necessarily mean they view it as credible. For instance, Rimmer and Weaver ("Different Questions, Different Answers?") found that only 22% of those who said television was their top choice for local news gave television a high credibility rating. Similarly, Westley and Severin ("Some Correlates") discovered that 38% of heavy radio listeners judged radio as credible and scores for other media tended to be below 50%.

31. Burns W. Roper, *Changing Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Mass Media, 1959-1976* (New York: Television Information Office, 1977); Harvey K. Jacobson, "Mass Media Believability: A Study of Receiver Judgments," *Journalism Quarterly* 46 (spring 1969): 20-28; Carter and Greenberg, "Which Do You Believe?" Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability;" Westley and Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility."

However, studies suggest that those who actively seek out information are more likely to see newspapers as credible (Ronald Mulder, "Media Credibility: A Uses-Gratifications Approach," *Journalism Quarterly* 57 [autumn 1980]:474-477). Also, studies indicate that those who are highly educated, older and male tend to be more likely to judge newspapers as credible than younger, less educated females (Mulder, "Log-Linear Analysis;" Carter and Greenberg "Newspapers or Television;" Westley and Severin, "Some Correlates;" Pew Charitable Trusts, "TV News Viewership Declines").

32. Jupiter Communications, "Portals Emerge as Dominant Source for Online News," December, 8, 1998, available at www.jup.com/jupiter/press/releases/1998/1208a.html

33. Childs, "Net to Eclipse Papers in Five Years?"

34. Johnson and Kaye, "Cruising is Believing."

35. Pew Research Center, "Internet News Audience."

36. Rebekah V. Bromley and Dorothy Bowles, "Impact of Internet on Use of Traditional News Media," *Newspaper Research Journal* 16 (spring 1995): 14-27; Barbara K. Kaye, "Uses and Gratifications of the World Wide Web: From Couch Potato to Web Potato," *New Jersey Journal of Communication* 6 (spring 1998): 21-40; GVU, "GVU's 7th WWW User Survey," available at http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1997-04/#exec; Pew Research Center, "Internet News Audience."

37. "Cybercampaigns Preach to the Choir," *Media and Campaigns 96 Briefing No. 1* (New York: Media Studies Center, 1996), 8-10.

38. Jon Katz, "The Digital Citizen," *Wired*, December 1997, 68-82, 274-275

39. Kevin A. Hill and John E. Hughes, *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Mark S. Bonchek, *From Broadcast to Netcast: The Internet and the Flow of Political Information*, Ph.D. diss, Harvard University, 1997.

40. Katz, "The Digital Citizen."

41. Bruce Bimber, "The Internet and Political Communication in the 1996 Election Season: A Research Note," available at http://www/sscf/ucsb.edu/~survey1; Erik P. Bucy, Paul D'Angelo, and John E. Newhagen, "New Media Use and Political Participation." paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Chicago, August 1997; Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye, "A Vehicle for Engagement or a Haven for the Disaffected?: Internet Use, Political Alienation, and Voter Participation," in *Engaging the Public: How Government and the Media Can Reinvigorate American Democracy*, eds. Thomas J. Johnson, Carol E. Hays and Scott P. Hays (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 123-135; Thomas J. Johnson and Barbara K. Kaye, "Democracy's Rebirth of Demise? the Influence of the Internet on Political Attitudes," accepted for publication in David Schultz, *It's Showtime! Media, Politics, Popular Culture*. Baltimore, MD: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.; Mark S. Bonchek, Roger Hurwitz and John Mallery, "Will the Web Democratize or Polarize the Political Process?," A White House Electronic Publications Survey," *World Wide Web Journal* 3 (1996), available at www.w3j.com/3/s3.bonchek.html.

In addition, Barbara K. Kaye and Thomas J. Johnson ("Online and In the Know: Uses and Gratifications of the Web for Political Information," presented to the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research annual convention, Chicago, November 1998) found that political interest was linked to using the Internet for information seeking, entertainment and social utility.

42. Bonchek, *From Broadcast to Netcast*.

43. Hill and Hughes, *Cyberpolitics;* Bimber, "The Internet and Political Communication in the 1996 Election Season;" Katz, "The Digital Citizen."

44. Katz, "The Digital Citizen; " Hill and Hughes, *Cyberpolitics.*

45. Hill and Hughes, *Cyberpolitics.*

46. "Who's Surfing the Net?," *The Public Perspective*, June/July 1996. Our study also suggests that there were an equal proportion of Republicans (32 percent) and Democrats (34 percent).

47. GVU, "GVU's 7th WWW User Survey."

48. Douglas Muzzio and David Birdsell, "The 1996 'Net Voter," *The Public Perspective,* December/January 1997; GVU, "GVU's 7th WWW User Survey."

49. Katz, "The Digital Citizen," 72.

50. Johnson and Kaye, "A Vehicle for Engagement or a Haven for the Disaffected?;" Bonchek, *From Broadcast to Netcast*; Katz, "The Digital Citizen."

51. Thomas J. Johnson, Mahmoud A.M. Braima and Jayanthi Sothirajah, "Doing the Traditional Media Sidestep: Comparing the Effects of the Internet and Other Nontraditional Media with Traditional Media in the 1996 Presidential Election," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, in press; GVU, "GVU's 7th WWW User Survey;" Brady, "Cyberdemocracy and Perceptions of Politics"; Johnson and Kaye, "Democracy's Rebirth or Demise?"

52. David Tewksbury, Heather Cox, Matthew Nixon and Shannon Proctor, "Political Uses of the Internet: A Study of Political Participation on the World Wide Web," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research, Chicago, November 1997.

53. Johnson, Braima and Sothirajah, "Doing the Traditional Media Sidestep."

54. Johnson and Kaye, "Democracy's Rebirth or Demise?"

55. Ronald Mulder, "A Log-Linear Analysis of Media Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 58 (winter 1981): 635-638; Michael J. Robinson and Andrew Kohut, "Believability and the Press," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 52 (1988): 174-189; American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Newspaper Credibility;* Times Mirror, *The People & the Press*; Whitney, *The Media and the People.*

56. Johnson and Kaye, "Cruising is Believing?"

57. "USA Today: Ethnic Disparity Decreases," available at http:usatoday.com/life/cyber/tech/ctc609.htm?st.ne.fd.mnaw, cited in http:/www.nua.ie/surveys, May 8, 1998; Pew Research Center, "Internet News Audience."

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58. "Mediamark Research Inc.: 72 Million Online in the US in August 1998," available at http://www.mediamark.com, cited at http://www.nua.ie/surveys, March 15, 1999; "Males Continue to Dominate the Web," available at www.nua.ie/surveys, February 9, 1998.

59. The Internet poses a unique set of problems in guaranteeing a random sample of respondents. The Web has no central registry of users and e-mail addresses to create a sampling frame. Response rates cannot be calculated because there is no way to know how many individuals may have seen the survey or its links, but refused to participate. Because participation is voluntary, those who choose to complete a cybersurvey may differ from those who choose not to participate. Voluntary participants may be more interested, informed and concerned about the survey topic and typically hold viewpoints which are stronger and more extreme than other individuals. Thus, results may not be able to be generalized to the population (Barbara K. Kaye and Thomas J. Johnson, "Taming the Cyber Frontier: Techniques for Improving Online Surveys," *Social Science Computer Review*, in press; Wei Wu and David Weaver, "Online Democracy or Online Demagoguery--Public Opinion 'Polls' on the Internet," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 2 (Fall 1997): 71-86).

60. Like other surveys, this one suggests the Internet is dominated by young white males of high education and high socioeconomic status. The average age in the survey is 31.2 while the gender ratio is 75.5% male and 24.5% female. Six out of ten have a college degree or higher and slightly less than half (45.1%) report an annual income between $25,001-$65,000. Finally, almost nine out of ten (88.3%) are white. Both the online GVU 7th WWW User Survey and the FIND/SVP American Internet User study, which was conducted by telephone, found that the average Internet user is in his 30s (35.2 and 36.5 years old respectively) and is male (68.7% in the GVU survey and 64.1% in the FIND/SVP study). More than half (54.2%) of respondents in the GVU study had a college education or higher and the average income was $58,000. Finally, the clear majority of respondents in both polls identified themselves as white. Finally, our finding that the typical Internet user spends an average of 13.2 hours on the Net compare favorably with recent studies that put the number at 13.6 ("What's Your Daily Dose?," *PC Magazine*, 18 November, 1997, p. 9).

61. Mark Douglas West, "Validating a Scale for the Measurement of Credibility: A Covariance Structure Modeling Approach," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (spring 1994): 159-168.

62. Cecilie Gaziano and Kristin McGrath, "Measuring the Concept of Credibility," *Journalism Quarterly* 63 (autumn 1986): 451-462.

63. Philip Meyer, "Defining and Measuring Credibility of Newspapers: Developing an Index," *Journalism Quarterly* 65 (fall 1988): 567-574, 588; John Newhagen and Clifford Nass, "Differential Criteria for Evaluating Credibility of Newspapers and TV News," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (Summer 1989): 277-284; Gaziano and McGrath, "Measuring the Concept of Credibility;" West, "Validating a Scale for the Measurement of Credibility."

While this study employed measures that have been used in past studies (i.e. believability, fairness, accuracy and depth), question wordings were not always identical to previous research.

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64. Wanta and Hu, "The Effects of Credibility"; Rimmer and Weaver, "Different Questions, Different Answers?"; Westley and Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility"; Carter and Greenberg, "Newspapers or Television"; Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability"; American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Building Reader Trust.*

65. Wanta and Hu, "Effects of Credibility"; Rimmer and Weaver, "Different Questions."

66. Mulder, "A Log-Linear Analysis;" American Society of Newspaper Editors, *Newspaper Credibility;* Times Mirror, *The People & the Press*; Whitney, *The Media and the People;* Carter and Greenberg, "Which Do You Believe?"; Greenberg, "Media Use and Believability"; Westley and Severin, "Some Correlates of Media Credibility."

67. Respondents were asked to record their age on their last birthday. They were also asked what is the highest grade or year in school they have completed (less than high school, high school grad, some college, four year college degree, master's degree, Ph.D. degree, other) and to estimate their annual income for 1996 (less than 10,000, 10,001-25,000, 25,001-40,000, 40,001-65,000, 65,001-80,000, 80,001-95,000, more than 95,000).

68. Bimber, "The Internet and Political Communication in the 1996 Election Season"; Bucy, D'Angelo, and Newhagen, "New Media Use and Political Participation"; Johnson and Kaye, "A Vehicle for Engagement or a Haven for the Disaffected?"; Johnson and Kaye, "Democracy's Rebirth or Demise?"; Bonchek, Hurwitz and Mallery, "Will the Web Democratize or Polarize the Political Process?"

69. Bonchek, *From Broadcast to Netcast.*

70. Hill and Hughes, *Cyberpolitics.*

71. Johnson and Kaye, A Vehicle for Engagement or a Haven for the Disaffected?;" Bonchek, *From Broadcast to Netcast.*; Katz, "The Digital Citizen".

72. Respondents were asked to indicate degree of interest in politics and the 1996 campaign in particular on a 0 to 10 scale with 0 being uninterested and 10 being very interested. A trust index was created from the following items from the National Election Studies; "Most of our leaders are devoted to service,' "Politicians never tell us what they really think" and "I don't think public officials care about what people like me think." Efficacy consisted of the following two statements from the NES: "People like me don't have any say what the government does" and "Every vote counts in an election, including yours and mine." Finally, party support was measured on a five-point scale from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican. This variable was recoded as a three-point scale: Independent, weak party supporter, strong party supporter.

73. Jupiter Communications, "Portals Emerge as Dominant Source for Online News," Pew Research Center, "Internet News Audience Goes Ordinary."

74. Fiona Chew, "The Relationship of Information Nees to Issue Relevance and Media Use," *Journalism Quarterly* 71 (autumn 1994):676-88; Hugh Culbertson and Guido H. Stempel III, "How Media Use and Reliance Affects Knowledge Level," *Communication Research* (1986): 579-602; Alexis S. Tan, "Mass Media Use, Issue Knowledge and Political Involvement," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 44 (1980):241-48.

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Autonomy in Journalism:
How It Is Related to Attitudes and Behavior of Media Professionals

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Introduction

The history of communicator analysis indicates that most of the research in this field has focused either on professional roles or on communication processes within newsrooms (cf. Weischenberg 1995, 1998). While the professionalism approach has primarily been concerned with role orientations in journalism (cf. e.g. Nayman 1973), the gatekeeper approach has observed and reconstructed editorial decisions for the selection of news.

The difference between these two more or less unconnected research directions often has led to one-sided reduction of media production to either aspects of journalists' attitudes or processes in a 'black box' which seems to work without any obvious contact to environment.

But there is one concept bridging the gap between the two approaches, which is autonomy. The degree of autonomy characterizes both journalists' actions and the structure of organizational systems, where media coverage is generated.

Autonomy is one of the key terms of the professionalization approach (cf. Windahl/Rosengren 1978). It means freedom to shape journalists' work without being determined by internal and external powers and, besides expertise, commitment to the job and responsibility, is used as the main indicator for professional orientations. This aspect is particularly crucial, insofar as journalism differs from 'real professions' by its legal preconditions.

There are a lot of political, economic, organizational, and technological constraints, which restrict journalists' autonomy almost naturally. This assessment corresponds directly with the evidence that gatekeeper research offers (cf. Robinson 1973). It emphasizes organizational self-regulation instead of individual self-determination or even defines the organization itself as the gatekeeper (cf. Bailey/Lichty 1972). Gatekeeper research started off with describing news selection as only determined by one single person (cf. White 1950) and ended up with explaining news production as a result of cybernetic mechanisms within a media institution (cf. Hienzsch 1990). All these individualistic, institutional or cybernetic perspectives have in common that media production has been described as autonomous processes.

Autonomy is, however, a Janus-faced factor in journalism. Journalists need a great amount of scope to do a good job. Insofar, their autonomy is directly connected to freedom of the media. Journalists (individuals) ought to be free in selecting information and in covering stories; newsrooms (organizations) ought to be independent from external influences, such as commercial or political constraints; and media systems (society) ought to have guaranteed press freedom and ought to be free from all kinds of censorship. For that reason, the degree of autonomy has been investigated in most of the 21 national surveys on journalism that have been published recently (cf. Weaver 1998: 24 f., 60, 80, 101, 197 f., 279, 271 f., 333 f., 442 f.).

But this is only one side of autonomy because autonomous journalism may also lead to being cut off from its audience or even to despise the audience (cf. Donsbach 1981). The notion of 'fourth estate' expresses the fear of an illegitimate power of journalism (cf. Lichter/Rothman/Lichter 1986). Although autonomy is a necessary condition of free journalism, it is not a sufficient condition for a free society because too much of it is often suspected to develop the journalists' tendency to cut themselves off from society and to oppose themselves to established institutions. Therefore, responsibility for "deciding what's news" (cf. Gans 1980) should not be monopolized by journalistic professionals – and it is in fact no longer, since Internet has opened the gates for all kinds of information (cf. Weischenberg 1985).

The concept of autonomy is also fundamental for modern social system theory, that has an increasing influence on communicator analysis (in Germany and elsewhere). This approach, however, prefers the term self-referentiality, which lays stress on the relationship between systems and their environments.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that a system theoretically guided observation of journalists' autonomy provides a more precise insight into the processes which constitute journalism. Based on empirical data, we will explore how autonomy and self-referentiality are related to certain attitudes and behaviors of media professionals.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Designing autonomy theoretically and empirically, we had to solve two major problems: First, in previous research autonomy *seemed* to be equated with self-referentiality, which is ordinarily defined as isolation from the environment by exclusively applying internal control of operations or actions. Second, autonomy either has been upheld as principal guarantee of free society or suspected for the danger of developing an isolated (journalistic) elite, which is beyond societal control. Accordingly, (journalistic) autonomy would lead to contradictory or even paradox consequences.

Social system theory offers a solution for such theoretical problems. Self-referentiality (or auto-referentiality) should not be conceptualized as a logical contrast to external referentiality (or allo-referentiality) because both kinds of references can empirically also be modelled as a mutual increasing relationship (cf. Fleischer 1998, Seppänen 1998). The German sociologist and system theorist Niklas Luhmann (cf. 1984: 250) defines the autonomy of a social system as the system's capability to manage a particular relationship between self-reference and external reference. A (social) system is not called autonomous, if it is entirely independent from its environment – this would be the case of autarky. Rather it is autonomous if it is able to select certain areas in its environment from which it gets certain impacts and in like manner or at the same time is able to shield from the influences of other environmental areas. Autonomy in this sense includes both, self-referentiality and external referentiality, and does not imply a certain normative decision in advance.

In journalism research, the status of perceived autonomy has been changing either as independent or dependent variable. In order to test consequences on attitudes and behavior of media professionals, we fixed autonomy and self-referentiality in journalism as the independent variable. As dependent variables we analyzed journalists' role perceptions, images of their audience, usage of unusual reporting practices, and attitudes toward public relations sources.

We have suggested that self-referential journalists insist to a particular great extent on individual autonomy, and that they claim a complete journalistic responsibility for deciding what is news. They view any constraints on their work as dysfunctional for media coverage. As conclusion from previous research, we have raised four specific hypotheses on correlations between self-referentiality and the four dependent variables:

1) Self-referential journalists perceive and perform their roles more communicator-oriented, but less service-oriented way than journalists normally do. Therefore, they emphasize a more political role and try to affect rather than to serve the political system and the public.
2) Self-referential journalists have a more negative image of their audience than journalists normally have. They regard their audience as passive and uninterested, because they do not really care of it.
3) Self-referential journalists are less concerned about applying unusual and illegal reporting practices than journalists normally do. Their principal concern is to get information not regarding ethical deliberations.
4) Self-referential journalists are skeptical toward their sources, particularly toward organized sources like public relations. That is why they assess press-releases more negatively than journalists normally do.

Method

The data used for this analysis base on the nationwide representative study on "Journalism in Germany" (cf. Weischenberg et al. 1998). The population under study included the full-time and the free-lance editorial staff of newspaper journals, news agencies, freesheets, magazines and radio and television stations. The complex sampling procedure consisted of a disproportional three-stage stratification, which could be corrected by weighting the sample with the correct parameters of the journalistic universe. The net sample finally included 1,498 journalists in East and West Germany. Although design and questionnaire followed the example of Johnstone et al. (1976) and of Weaver/Wilhoit (1986, 1996), the German study slightly differed from the U.S. surveys in defining journalism in a more extensive way: Additionally to 'hard' news people, we included infotainment journalists; we also interviewed journalists working for freesheets and for other peripheral media; and we picked up professional freelancers. The interviews were conducted in person for two reasons: the questionnaire was too long for telephone interviews, and the telephone network in East Germany was – at that time – not enough developed and extended (cf. Scholl 1996; Weischenberg et al. 1998: 232 ff.).

For the purpose of this paper, we selected several variables as indicators for self-referentiality (cf. table 1): From a theoretical point of view, self-referentiality in journalism can be classified into (a) interpersonal, (b) organizational and (c) inter-media dimensions.

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insert Table 1 about here

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With interpersonal self-referentiality we mean the fact that journalists have a lot of colleagues or other journalists in their private circles of acquaintances. If the journalist's father or mother is also a journalist we took this as an indicator for self-reference, too. Indicators for interpersonal external references were non-journalistic persons in private circle of acquaintances or the fact that a journalist is in office of a non-journalistic organization.

Organizational self-referentiality included political, professional and work integration in the newsroom. Political integration means the absence of a difference between the journalist's own political attitudes and those of his or her colleagues or of the editorial policy of the journalist's media organization. A journalist is professionally integrated if he or she is member of a journalistic organization, association or union or if the media organization has established a statute for the editorial staff and particularly promotes women journalists, etc. Work integration refers to certain specific reactions or more general influences on the journalist's work by his or her colleagues *within* the newsroom and to how often story checking is practiced. External referentiality means that journalists get various reactions from external non-journalistic sources, persons or organizations.

Taking inter-media self-referentiality into consideration is due to our theoretical approach, which supposes that journalism is a societal system. Although other media organizations are competitors for the newsroom and belong to the environment of the newsroom – which can be described as an organizational system –, all media organizations are elements of the *societal* system journalism and belong to it. So far, professional reactions of other media's colleagues on the journalist's work are a kind of self-reference within the system-theoretical framework. The same is true for journalists using other media coverage for professional reasons, e.g. in order to get hints for new topics and issues. The more a journalist uses other media for reporting and investigating, the more this operation may be called a self-referential one.

Results

The analytical strategy consisted of three steps: First, dimensions of self-referentiality could be explored with the help of a principal component analysis. Second, journalists who work within a self-referential structure could be separated from other groups of journalists with the help of a confirmatory cluster analysis. Therefore, we fixed the centroid or profile of one cluster on above average values of several variables indicating self-referentiality in journalism. Third, we were looking for differences between the self-referential cluster and the remainder of the sample in sociodemographic variables, professional education, journalistic work, role performance, images of the audience, use of unusual reporting practices and use of press-releases. These comparisons were used to describe the self-referential cluster in detail and to test the hypotheses stipulated above, while the previous principal component and cluster analyses prepared this research objective stepwise.

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insert Table 2 about here

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(1) The principal component analysis resulted in two main findings (cf. table 2):
(a) There are more independent components or factors empirically found than theoretically presumed. Self-referentiality obviously is not a single dimension, but consists of different facets. In addition, the empirically found dimensions do not exactly correspond to those theoretically presumed. Two differences are worth being scrutinized:
We did not expect that external reactions and reactions of colleagues working for other media on journalist's work load on the same factor. Certainly journalists think of their colleagues working for other media as competitors or, theoretically speaking, as not belonging to the

same journalistic system. This is due to the fact, that journalists do their job within an organizational context, i.e. within a newsroom.

We did not expect either, that being member of a journalistic organization or association would correlate with having a journalist as father or mother. We expected, however, that it would correlate with a newsroom statute for the editorial staff or with the existence of measures to promote women journalists, which has proved not to be the case. Being organized in a professional association or union seems to be a more personal concern, whereas unionist achievements within the newsroom is a more political or organizational concern.

(b) There is no simple contrast between self-referentiality and external referentiality. On the one hand, both variables do not correlate negatively, as should be if they were the two poles of a unidimensional scale, but they actually do load positively on the same factor. This is the case with journalists believing as well that the journalists themselves or the newsroom as journalistic organization has most influence on media coverage as reporting a high influence of external sources, such as political parties, enterprises, trade unions, economic associations or other societal institutions. In other words: A high external pressure corresponds with a high internal integration within the newsroom. Of course, this correlation cannot be interpreted in a causal manner.

On the other hand, both variables load on different factors and are independent. This is the case with external and inter-media reactions (factor 3) and with internal reactions on journalists' work and with frequency of story checking within the newsroom (factor 6).

(2) In addition to the substantial findings, the principal component analysis was used to reduce the variables to independent dimensions. Redundant variables could now be weighted less in the subsequent cluster analysis than those variables loading highest on their factors. The results of the principal component analysis helped us selecting relevant variables for the next step of data analysis.

Primarily, the cluster analysis was not applied to explain as much variance of the analyzed variables as possible, but to create one specific cluster with the profile of high self-referentiality in several dimensions.[1] The profiles of the remaining clusters were of only minor interest, so we just processed a two clusters solution. The first trial to define the self-referential cluster as a profile with the above average values of *all* variables indicating self-referentiality failed, because the algorithm could not find any journalist who fitted to the given profile.

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[1] The cluster analysis used here is neither an hierarchical procedure nor the k-means algorithm provided by SPSS, but a stand-alone program developed by the German sociologist Hans Bardeleben (cf. 1995). It is based on an iterative minimal distance algorithm. In the first step, the respondents are randomly sorted into a given number of clusters. Then, the algorithm exchanges the cases iteratively to optimize the relationship of between variances, which must tend to a maximum, and within variances, which must be minimized. Contrary to the SPSS routines, this program is able to process confirmatory cluster analyis with given centroids.

As the self-referential journalist did not exist, we had to fix a more moderate centroid including only *relevant* variables, which was finally defined as follows (cf. table 3):

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insert Table 3 about here

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Journalists to be grouped in the self-referential cluster had to get more inter-media reactions as well as reactions from their own newsroom on his or her work than the journalists in the remaining cluster do. Furthermore, they had to report more influences on coverage of sources *within* the newsroom, had to get their stories checked more frequently and had to use more other media for professional reasons than journalists generally do. In addition to this *theoretically* given profile, cluster analysis algorithm *empirically* grouped journalists in this cluster who more often have journalists in their private circle of acquaintances, who more often have a statute for the editorial staff in their newsrooms, and who get more external reactions on their work than journalists in the remaining cluster do.

The self-referential cluster estimated by the algorithm finally consisted of (only) 93 journalists. It can be described with the following characteristics: There are more journalists in this cluster than in the whole sample[2] working for the public TV (15.2 % vs. 6.2 %), but not a single journalist working for freesheets (0 % vs. 10.9 %). More of them than overall frequency cover a cultural (20.2 % vs. 11.9 %), but less a local and regional beat (11.7 % vs. 18.4 %). There are no significant differences in position in the newsroom hierarchy, in years of education, or in gender. Self-referential journalists more often only have a training on the job (28.3 % vs. 20.0 %), but do not differ from average in academic ways of professional qualification (study of journalism, communication science or another subject).

They are three years younger (34 years vs. 37 years), have two years less professional experience than average (8 years vs. 10 years), and they work three hours more a week (49 h vs. 46 h). With regard to specific journalistic occupations, we found out that journalists belonging to the self-referential cluster do less selecting (37 min. vs. 49 min.) but more organizing and administrative work (90 min. vs. 69 min.) than the average journalist does. There are no further differences in spending time for reporting, writing or editing activities.

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[2] In our data analysis, we did not compare means of the self-referential cluster with means of the remaining cluster but with means of the total sample because the profile of the remaining cluster was not defined substantially and could not be used as a contrast group.

Test of hypotheses

For the test of the hypotheses we compared means of several items of role perceptions, reporting practices, images of the audience and assessment of the quality of press-releases, again between the *self-referential cluster* and the *total sample* of journalists.

(1) Role perception included 21 items, which could be combined into different independent dimensions, such as political, idealistic, entertaining and service-oriented, and information journalism (cf. Scholl/Weischenberg 1998: 167 ff. and Weischenberg et al. 1998: 242 ff.). As table 4 depicts, the first hypothesis can be mainly verified. Indeed, self-referential journalists support particularly some politically oriented professional aims, such as 'controlling politics, business and society', 'being an adversary of public officials', 'investigating claims and statements of the government', 'being an adversary of business' and 'influencing the political agenda'.

In addition, there are four roles emphasized by self-referential journalists, which do not strictly perform political functions, but which are also communicator-oriented: They approve to a significant higher degree of 'criticizing bad states of affairs', 'presenting their own opinion to the public', 'providing analyses and interpretations of complex problems' and 'developing intellectual and cultural interests of the public'.

The second part of the hypothesis says that self-referential journalists are less interested in service-oriented coverage, e.g. 'providing entertainment and relaxation' or 'helping people in their everyday lives'. This part does not approve to be true because there are no significant differences between self-referential cluster and total sample. We interprete this finding as another indicator for the multi-dimensional character of self-referentiality. Even if self-referential journalists do favor an active role performance, including political or influential journalism, they do not necessarily neglect other functions of journalism. There is not a single item of which self-referential journalists significantly approve to a less degree than the total sample. In sum, they belong to an ambitious species of journalists (cf. Weischenberg et al. 1998: 245).

(2) Images of the audience can be divided in three dimensions: *civic characteristics*, e.g. politically (un)interested, (ir)responsible, (un)committed, well/badly informed, or (un)educated; *ideological aspects*, e.g. conservative/progressive, (in)tolerant, narrow-/open-minded, politically left/right; and *social class related descriptions*, e.g. poor/rich, (un)influential or self-

confident/anxious. In no case self-referential journalists differ significantly from other journalists. Obviously, self-referentiality is not correlated with certain characteristics of images which journalists develop of their audience. This finding can also be interpreted within the frame of multi-dimensionality of self-referentiality. Self-referentiality does not imply a specific negative or even cynical view of the audience. Both variables are simply (statistically) independent.

(3) Self-referential journalists are also supposed to be unscrupulous with regard to reporting practices. Previous findings suggest that German journalists have refined attitudes toward unusual methods to get information: They legitimize some of them moderately depending on the circumstances, which we called "aggressive methods", and consequently disapprove of others, which we labelled "unscrupulous methods" (cf. Weischenberg et al. 1998: 247 f.; Scholl/Weischenberg 1998: 190 f.).

Although this difference seemed to occur particularly in Germany (cf. several chapters in Weaver 1998; Scholl/Weischenberg 1998: 230), we found it again, when correlating reporting practices with self-referentiality in journalism. Self-referential journalists agree with some aggressive methods to gain information to a higher degree than the total sample does, but do also disagree with one specific unscrupulous method more than journalists normally do. So they gradually *approve* more than all journalists together of 'paying people for confidential information', of 'using confidential government documents without authorization' and of 'getting employed in an organization to gain inside information' and in like manner *disapprove* of 'agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so'. Even more than journalists normally do, self-referential journalists feel a difference between unscrupulous methods and unusual methods which they nevertheless consider legitimate under certain circumstances.[3]

In sum, we do not have to reject this hypothesis entirely, because self-referential journalists do indeed agree to unusual reporting practices more than the total sample of journalists. The reason for this aggressive comprehension of their work, however, does not seem to emerge from ethical immaturity or from a lack of ethical consciousness because the self-referential cluster disapproves of all unscrupulous methods at all and of one of it even more consequently than all journalists together. Again, self-referentiality does not imply any kind of self-closure or a lack of sensitiveness toward the environment. What is true for autonomy, is also valid for self-referentiality: A high degree of self-referentiality corresponds with a high degree of environmental attention.

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[3] We did not find significant differences for all items we asked respondents. Especially in the case of unscrupulous methods this is due to a bottom effect because of low overall agreement with these items, which have only little variances.

(4) Finally, we expected self-referential journalists to be skeptical of public relations sources. Respondents should therefore assess nine statements toward the quality of press-releases. Indeed, the self-referential cluster proves to be less pragmatic and more critical than the average journalist. Self-referential journalists consider press-releases less reliable and worse prepared than journalists normally do. In addition, self-referential journalists complain about the existence of too many of them more intensively and suspect more often to be tempted to uncritical reporting by press-releases. Although differences between self-referential cluster and total sample are only significant for these four of all nine items we asked respondents to assess, the tendency is clear, and the hypothesis is verified for the most part.

Discussion

For a long time, researchers thought that journalism could be described in terms of contrasting categories. Particularly journalists' role perceptions were analyzed in simple dichotomies, such as neutral vs. partisan, and also journalists' political attitudes. In the case of autonomy, which is a key term of different approaches in the field of communicator analysis, we could demonstrate that social system theory can help to observe journalism in a more complex and adequate way. Our study has shown that autonomy is a multidimensional construct.

In sum, autonomy does not imply that journalists have no contact with the environment, but that their relationships with environment are more *selective*. Eventually, autonomy does not mean a system's independence from external impact, but is the system's internal selection of which external impacts are allowed, to put it in terms of social system theory. It seems reasonable to replace an 'either ... or' logic by an 'as well ... as' logic. We found some empirical evidence for that in the case of journalistic profession.

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Abstract

Autonomy is a main characteristic of professions. Social system theory suggests observing journalism in terms of self-referentiality and external referentiality. In our study "Journalism in Germany", we could identify a particular self-referential group of journalists, which differed from the rest of the sample regarding role perception, unusual reporting practices and assessment of press-releases. Data provided further evidence for a more complex and adequate perspective on journalists' attitudes and behavior.

Table 1: Theoretical classification of several dimensions of self-referentiality in journalism

theoretical dimension	**empirical indicator(s)/variable(s)**
interpersonal dimension	*indicators for self-referentiality*: 1) mother or father also journalist, 2) journalists as one of three best friends, 3) percentage of journalists in private circle of acquaintances, 4) journalists in private circle of acquaintances *indicators for external references*: 5) non-journalistic persons in private circle of acquaintances, 6) being in office of a non-journalistic organization
organizational dimension	*indicators for self-referentiality*:
a) political integration	a1) difference between journalist's political attitude and editorial policy, a2) difference between journalist's political attitude and colleagues' political attitudes
b) professional integration	b1) member in a journalistic organization or association, b2) statute for the editorial staff, b3) measures for promoting women journalists
c) work integration	c1) internal newsroom reactions on journalist's work, c2) internal newsroom influences on day-to-day job, c3) frequency of story checking *indicators for external references*: c4) external reactions on journalist's work, c5) external non-journalistic influences on day-to-day job
inter-media dimension	*indicators for self-referentiality*: 1) number of regularly used media, 2) number of regularly used politically left media, 3) number of regularly used politically right media, 4) reactions from other media's colleagues on journalist's work,

Table 2: Principal component analysis of self-referentiality variables in journalism

Indicators for self-referentiality	factor 1	factor 2	factor 3	factor 4	factor 5	factor 6	factor 7	factor 8	factor 9	communality
number of regularly used media	.90									.85
number of regularly used politically left media	.80									.71
number of regularly used politically right media	.75									.69
journalists as one of three best friends		.78								.62
percentage of journalists in private circle of acquaintances		.72								.61
journalists in private circle of acquaintances		.52				(.39)				.45
external reactions on journalist's work			.78							.68
reactions from other media's colleagues on journalist's work			.77							.62
difference between journalist's political attitude and editorial policy				.82						.70
difference between journalist's political attitude and colleagues' political attitudes				.79						.66
measures to promote women journalists					.81					.72
statute for the editorial staff					.79					.69
internal newsroom reactions to journalist's work						.70				.59
frequency of story checking						.66				.56
external influence on day-to-day job							.85			.78
internal newsroom influence on day-to-day job						(.33)	.68			.64
being in office of a non-journalistic organization								.80		.68
non-journalistic persons in private circle of acquaintances			(.36)					(.47)		.50
mother or father also journalist									.87	.81
member in a journalistic organization or association		(.30)						(.35)	.53	.53
eigenvalue/KMO	2.2	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.1	.61
explained variance	10.9	8.2	7.8	6.9	6.9	6.5	6.5	6.2	5.6	65.5

Table 3: Profile of the self-referential cluster

Indicators for self-referentiality	Scales of variables	Means of self-referential cluster n=93	Overall means n=1498
mother or father also journalist	0-1	0.03	0.06
journalists as one of three best friends	0-1	0.53	0.51
percentage of journalists in private circle of acquaintances	0-99 (%)	29.48	25.15
journalists in private circle of acquaintances	0-1	0.93**	0.84
non-journalistic persons in private circle of acquaintances	0-4	1.01	0.84
being in office of a non-journalistic organization	0-3	0.12*	0.20
difference between journalist's political attitude and editorial policy	0-7	1.71	1.69
difference between journalist's political attitude and colleagues' political attitudes	1-5	2.80	2.85
member in a journalistic organization or association	0-1	0.49	0.56
statute for the editorial staff	0-2	1.55*	1.37
measures for promoting women journalists	0-3	1.01	0.91
internal newsroom reactions on journalist's work	0-2	2.00***	1.46
reactions from other media's colleagues on journalist's work	0-1	1.00***	0.33
external reactions on journalist's work	0-5	2.81***	2.05
internal newsroom influences on day-to-day job	1-5	4.36***	3.80
external non-journalistic influences on day-to-day job	1-5	3.57	3.48
frequency of story checking	1-5	4.75***	3.65
number of regularly used media	1-24	11.83***	8.36
number of regularly used politically left media	0-8	3.71***	2.44
number of regularly used politically right media	0-6	1.78***	1.29

Variables in italics were fixed above average for the profile of the self-referential cluster.
*, **, *** = significantly different from overall means ($p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, $p < 0.001$)

Table 4: Role perception, reporting practices, and assessment of press-releases*

Items**	Means of self-referential cluster n=93	Overall means n=1498
Role perceptions:		
providing analyses and interpretations of complex problems	4.30	4.01
criticizing bad states of affairs	4.02	3.73
developing intellectual and cultural interests of the public	3.72	3.45
being an adversary of public officials by being constantly skeptical of their actions	3.34	2.95
controlling politics, business and society	3.30	2.94
presenting the own opinion to the public	3.11	2.80
investigating claims and statements made by the government	3.11	2.73
being an adversary of business by being constantly skeptical of their actions	2.96	2.64
influencing the political agenda and set issues on the political agenda	2.83	2.45
Reporting practices:		
using confidential government documents without authorization	2.99	2.58
getting employed in an organization to gain inside information	2.89	2.53
paying people for confidential information	2.55	2.30
agreeing to protect confidentiality and not doing so	1.23	1.37
Assessment of press-releases:		
information in press-releases is reliable	3.04	3.36
press-releases are well prepared	2.70	3.06
there are too many press-releases	3.57	3.32
press-releases tempt to uncritical reporting	3.15	2.85

* Table 4 documents only significant differences between means of self-referential cluster and of complete sample ($p < .05$). There were no significant differences in items of images of the audience.

** All scales range from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (do agree entirely).

Methodological aspects of the study "Journalism in Germany" (cf. Weischenberg et al. 1998)

type of media organization:	newspaper journals (including freesheets) news agencies and media service bureaus general-interest and special-interest magazines public and private broadcast stations and networks
mode of employment:	permanently employed editorial staff and professional freelancers
type of beats:	news people and infotainment journalists
sampling procedure:	disproportional three-stage stratification
sample size:	N = 1,498
mode of interviewing:	face-to-face interviews
questionnaire:	comparable to Johnstone et al. (1976) and to Weaver/Wilhoit (1986, 1996)
fieldwork:	April to September 1993

Final Draft

Screen sex, 'zine sex, and teen sex:

Do television and magazines cultivate adolescent females' sexual attitudes?

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Abstract

A cultivation analysis of a national sample of 1,921 high school girls shows that magazines may mitigate attitudes toward the frequently risky sexual behaviors shown on television. Girls who said they learned about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy from both magazines and television were more likely than girls who learned about these issues from television but not magazines to say they would be upset if they became pregnant at their current age.

Screen sex, 'zine sex, and teen sex: Do television and magazines cultivate adolescent females' sexual attitudes?

Although America has experienced an 11% drop in adolescent sexual intercourse since 1991 (Centers for Disease Control, 1998), the U.S. still has the highest adolescent rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and adolescent birth rates of any industrialized nation in the world (Piot & Islam, 1994). The number of AIDS cases among American adolescents has multiplied seven-fold over the past decade (Centers for Disease Control, 1998). By 9th grade, almost four out of 10 (38%) American teenagers are already sexually active (Kirby, Korpi, Adivi & Weissman, 1997). Although more than half of 16-year-old boys (65%) and 17-year-old girls (51%) have had sexual intercourse, fewer than half of sexually active teenaged boys and only about one third (38%) of sexually active teenaged girls say that they use birth control every time they have intercourse, and one in five (19%) reports that he or she never uses birth control (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1998).

What part do the media play in promoting this behavior? Researchers and critics frequently cite media as having an important role in the socialization of sexual knowledge and attitudes. Early on, Roberts (1982, p. 209) enumerated four reasons why televison was an important sex educator: "1) the adult nature of most programming children watch; 2) children's limited access to experience with countervailing information or ideas; 3) the 'realism' with which roles, relationships, and lifestyles are portrayed; and 4) the overwhelming consistency of the messages about sexuality that are communicated." We still know very little about how this process works, however. In this paper, we closely examine the relationship between use of two principal media sources (television and magazines) and adolescent girls' attitudes toward sexuality and pregnancy.

Sexy broadcasts, sexual behavior?

The average American teenager views approximately 14,000 sexual references, innuendos, and jokes on television per year — but only about 165 of these deal with topics such as birth control, self-control, abstinence, or STDs (Committee on Communications, American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995). The most comprehensive content analysis of sex on TV has shown that more than half (56%) of all television shows contain sexual content, averaging more than three scenes with sex per hour (Kunkel, Cope, Farinola, Biely, Rollin & Donnerstein, 1999). And more than two out of three prime-time network programs feature either talk about sex or sexual behavior, presenting an average of more than five scenes involving sex each hour. Fewer than one in 10 of the programs on television with sexual content include either any mention of the potential risks — or responsibilities — involved in sexual activity or any reference to contraception or safe sex. Only 1% of all shows with sexual content maintain a primary focus throughout the program on issues concerning sexual risks or responsible behaviors (Kunkel *et. al*, 1999).

Are these patterns of media portrayals and teen sexual activity related?

More than half (51%) of the 2,944 American high school students participating in the 1997 Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescents cited television as a source of knowledge about contraception and pregnancy prevention (Sutton, Brown, Wilson & Klein, 1999). However, only a few studies have focused on the relationship between the media's presentations of sexual activity and teenagers' attitudes toward sexuality (Huston, Wartella & Donnerstein, 1998). The few available studies of the possible link between TV viewing of sex and sexual knowledge suggest there may be a connection. The most common message promoted by television targeted to teens emphasizes a recreational approach to sex, and presents sexual relations as a competition for partners, with three out of four speakers (74%) discussing "scoring, cheating on partners, stealing partners, and fighting over dates" (Ward, 1995, p. 561). Among sexually experienced teens in real life, almost half (49%) have had two or more partners (Kaiser

Family Foundation, 1998), and by age 18, 45% of females report having had intercourse with four or more partners. Males report having had sex with an average of five partners (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995).

Research has shown that girls who are beginning to explore their sexuality and the nature of romantic relationships — due to the changing cognitive and developmental needs of early teens — are especially drawn to the "sexual scripts" presented in media depictions of male-female relationships, although directionality is not clear (Brown, Childers & Waszak, 1990). Soap operas — which are especially popular with adolescent girls — provide a fertile source of sexual scripts (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995). The sexual content on soap operas doubled during the 1980s, and sex between unmarried partners on soap operas has been measured as 24 times more common than sex between spouses on these programs; contraception is rarely mentioned (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1995; Lowry & Towles, 1989). The consequences of pregnancy and responsibilities of single motherhood also are presented in a positive light on soap operas. High-school age soap opera viewers have been shown to be significantly more likely than nonviewers to believe that adolescent single mothers have better-than-minimum-wage jobs, healthy babies, their own apartments, and ample time to go out with their friends and to get college degrees (Larson, 1996).

Another study of middle- and high-school students found that regular viewers of primetime soap operas were significantly more likely to identify with the belief that "luck is important" than viewers of any other type of program (Potter, 1990). This is hardly surprising if risky, unprotected sexual behavior with multiple partners is such a common soap opera motif. Media content may influence risk perception among adolescent media consumers because the characters portrayed rarely experience adverse effects as a result of irresponsible acts (Klein, Brown, Childers, Oliveri, Porter & Dykers, 1993).

The role of magazines in the media mix

Magazines are another important source of sexual information, especially for adolescent girls. Six out of 10 high school-age girls (63%) in the Commonwealth Fund Survey said they had learned about birth control, contraception, or pregnancy prevention from magazines; only four out of 10 boys (40%) said they had.

A three-year content analysis of *Seventeen*, one of the most popular of teen girl magazines, found that the fiction and non-fiction stories taught a teenaged girl that "her job is to look good, find a boyfriend, and take care of home and hearth" (Peirce, 1993, p. 61). Other researchers have reported similar findings in *Sassy*, *Seventeen*, and *Young Miss* (Evans, Rutberg, Sather & Turner, 1991). A comparative content analysis of two European general interest magazines aimed at adolescent boys (*Webber*) and girls (*Yes*) found socialization into traditional gender roles a continuing trend. Articles on relationships in *Yes*, the girls' magazine, focused on being in love and getting noticed by a boy. In *Webber*, sex took center stage when relationships were discussed, with love presented as an unwanted barrier to dropping a girl (Willemsen, 1998). A textual analysis of the gendered roles in *Seventeen* and *YM* magazines found a schizophrenic dichotomy in the message directed at teens: The socially constructed rules of sexuality for young females simultaneously demand that they make themselves sexually alluring to males, yet maintain a chaste lifestyle (Durham, 1998). This mixed message is largely attributable to the influence of cosmetics and fashion advertisers, and "socializes girls into roles that historically have been advantageous to men in multiple arenas, including the workplace" (Durham, 1998, p. 378).

Teen girl magazines apparently are doing a better job than TV of presenting sexual health messages, however. A yearlong study of leading teen magazines such as *Seventeen* found that two out of every five articles (42%) about sexual issues focused on sexual health topics. More than half of the sexual coverage included mention of contraception, unintended pregnancy, STDs, or HIV/AIDS. Condoms increasingly became the contraceptive mentioned in teen magazines between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s; 72% of articles mentioning contraception featured condoms — up from 50% at the beginning of the 10-year period. At the same time, coverage of birth control pills declined, a trend which probably reflects greater public concern over HIV (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1997).

Taken collectively, these studies indicate that both teen television and magazines promote the same — yet in the real world, unresolvable — dual identity for adolescent girls: first as sexually active — and sometimes even promiscuous — beings, and second as chastity-minded individuals who need to restrain or direct their sexuality into securing a monogamous relationship with a man.

This study examines whether a relationship exists between the quantity of television watched by high school-age females and their attitudes toward sexuality, contraception, and pregnancy. Is television cultivating beliefs that may lead to risky sexual behaviors? Do these relationships hold across demographic subgroups, and does the use of other media, such as magazines, reinforce or mitigate these beliefs?

Applying a cultivation perspective

Cultivation theory provides a useful framework for investigating the relationship between the sexual messages embedded in television programs and perceptions about sexuality and pregnancy among female adolescents.

Advocates of cultivation theory have argued that television is the central enculturating arm of American society (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1994). They view TV as a uniquely invasive medium present in the home from cradle-to-grave, designed by the corporate powers-that-be to act as an "agency of the established order." The medium reinforces and stabilizes existing social patterns through televised depictions of American society, providing a distorted lens through which viewers see the world around them and, eventually, their own places in it (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 175; Gerbner *et al.*, 1994). Cultivation theory proposes that researchers focus less on more easily measurable short-term media effects and pay more attention to the long-term ways in which mass media may cultivate subtle but cumulatively powerful cultural attitudes (Gerbner, 1969). Cultivation effects on different demographic groups have been likened to gravity's persistent tug, "where each group [of viewers] may strain in a different direction, but all groups are affected by the same central current" (Gerbner *et al.* 1994, p. 24).

Much cultivation analysis has focused on portrayals of television violence and victimization (Bryant, Carveth & Brown, 1981; Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Chaffee, Gerbner, Hamburg, Pierce, Rubinstein, Siegel & Singer, 1984; Doob & Macdonald, 1979; Hawkins & Pingree, 1980, 1981; Morgan, 1983; Potter, 1988; Signorielli, Gerbner & Morgan, 1995). A few studies address the cultivation of gender-role stereotypes and attitudes toward sexuality — how television frames the role of women in American society in a way that minimalizes their presence and disproportionately features women who are young and sexually attractive (Carveth & Alexander, 1985; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gross & Jeffries-Fox, 1978). The bottom line for television executives, Gerbner asserts, is *the bottom line*: violence and sex sell. Both are easy ways to stimulate an audience, maximizing viewership and profits from advertising revenues (Gerbner *et al.*, 1994), and both affect how viewers perceive the world.

This suggests that television's frequent use of sexual messages may act as a potent socializing force among American adolescents exploring their nascent sexuality. Cultivation studies of soap opera viewers, for example, have found correlations between viewers' perceptions of social reality and the content of soap opera stories (Buerkel-Rothfus & Mayes, 1981; Larson, 1996). A cultivation study of 3,000 high-school seniors found a relationship between frequency of TV viewing and ambivalent attitudes toward marriage. Heavier viewing correlated with a tendency to question the institution of marriage due to all of the unhappy marriages observed; nonetheless, teens did not reject lifelong marriage to one person as a goal (Signorielli, 1991).

The principal criticism directed at cultivation has been that the theory does not draw a fine enough distinction between causality and correlation, drawing broad conclusions about media effects without clearly establishing directionality (Shapiro, 1992). However, Gerbner and his colleagues have proposed that television's pervasive influence intermingles with layers of social, personal, and non-media cultural contexts in a dynamic cultivation process, shaping and in turn being shaped by these factors (Gerbner *et al.*, 1994). Some cultivation researchers see a greater need to address the different messages encoded in various TV genres or to examine the varying ways that individual viewers may interpret the same television programs (Hall, 1980; Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; Potter, 1993; Potter & Chang, 1990; Rubin, Perse & Taylor, 1988). Nonetheless, statistically significant correlations between television viewing and cultivated constructions of social reality persistently have emerged in cultivation studies (Gerbner *et al.*, 1994).

TV and sexual value systems

Due to television's ubiquitous presentation of sexual behavior — but frequent failure to include messages about STDs or unwanted pregnancies — we expected to find a positive correlation between the number of hours viewed each week and positive attitudes toward pregnancy and risky sexual behaviors. A lack of relationship, on the other hand, would indicate that television programming awash in sexual references and portrayals of risky sexual activity does not necessarily cultivate approval of irresponsible sexual behavior or of getting pregnant among adolescents. Our first hypothesis addressed these issues.

Hypothesis 1: *High school-age girls who watch more television are more likely to accept risky sexual behaviors, to have negative attitudes toward contraception, birth control, and pregnancy prevention, and to have positive attitudes about getting pregnant.* Recent studies have found frequent presentations of sexual material across almost all types of TV programming, with little or no attention typically paid to risks or responsibilities. Given the positive portrayal of adolescent single motherhood — especially on soap operas — revealed by previous research, cultivation theory would predict that girls who view a greater amount of TV would be less likely to be "upset" about getting pregnant than those who watch less TV.

Our second hypothesis addressed the possible interaction between television and magazine messages about sexuality.

Hypothesis 2: *Using magazines to complement information about contraception birth control, and pregnancy prevention acquired from television might — due to magazine content about STDs and birth control — mitigate positive attitudes toward risky sexual behaviors and pregnancy cultivated by TV.* Female teens who named television but not magazines as a source of contraception information should be more likely to express support for statements endorsing risky sexual behaviors and less likely to support safe sexual behaviors than girls who named both television and magazines as sources. Prior studies of magazine content have revealed no positive portrayals of single motherhood as are found on television; female teen magazines also appear to devote a greater percentage of sexually oriented content to issues such as unwanted pregnancy. Cultivation theory would lead us to expect that girls who cited TV but not magazines as a source of contraception information will be less likely to be "upset" about getting pregnant than those who cited both TV and magazines as sources.

Sample

The data used in this study were collected in the 1997 Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescents. Stratified samples of students at 297 public, private, and parochial schools — drawn from a database of about 80,000 schools provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics — were selected to complete a questionnaire administered by Lou Harris and Associates. The responses of the 6,748 adolescents in grades 5-12 who completed the survey were weighted to reflect national demographics in terms of gender, race, geographic region (rural, suburban, and urban), and grade enrollment. Four differing versions of the survey were administered, targeting boys in grades 5-8, girls in grades 5-8, boys in grades 9-12, and girls in grades 9-12. Some questions regarding sources of information about contraception and birth control were asked only of students in grades 9-12, and other questions about attitudes regarding pregnancy and sexuality were directed solely at females. This analysis focused on the one group whose version of the survey did not exclude any questions: girls in grades 9-12. This sample included 1,921 respondents.

Measures

For Hypothesis 1, television viewers were separated into *light*, *medium*, and *heavy* viewing groups. Respondents were asked about their television-viewing habits: "On average, how many hours of television per day do you watch on a school day and on a weekend day?" Response categories ranged from: "none," "about 1 hour," "about 2 hours," "about 3 hours," "about 4 hours," and "about 5 hours," to "more than 5 hours" and "don't know." For the purposes of this study, adolescents (N=273) who reported not knowing both weekday and weekend viewing habits were excluded. To create a composite variable to estimate total weekly TV exposure, the number of reported hours per weekday was multiplied by five, and added to the number of hours per weekend day multiplied by two. Respondents answering "more than five" were considered as watching six hours. (Thus this number may underestimate the quantity of television watching by especially heavy viewers.) The distribution was heavily weighted toward the high end of the scale; the modal value for TV watching was 42 hours per week, although the mean number of hours was 18.2. For this reason, the scale was divided into three approximately equal groups: *Light* viewers watched 0-11 hours of television per week, *medium* viewers watched 12-22 hours of television per week, and *heavy* viewers watched 23-42 hours per week.

Television viewing in the Commonwealth Survey was measured in bulk hours and not in terms of content. In theory, one hypothetical viewer could be watching six hours of religious programming per week, and another two hours of "sexy" programming (MTV videos, *Dawson's Creek* or *Melrose Place*), and there would be no way of discerning it from these data. However, this caveat may be balanced by both the large, demographically representative sample and the sheer preponderance of sexual material on television among all programming (Kunkel *et al.*, 1999). If 56% of all television shows contain sexual content, and more than 67% of all network prime-time programs present either talk about sex or sexual behavior, a viewer with a heavier television diet seems more likely to encounter such programming than one with a lighter diet.

For Hypothesis 2, the sample was divided into four categories of *media sources for contraception information* — those who had "learned about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy" from:

- TV and magazines
- TV but not magazines
- Magazines but not TV
- Neither TV nor magazines

The dependent variables were *attitudes toward sexual behavior* and *attitudes about pregnancy*.

Risky and safe *attitudes toward sexual behavior* were measured by asking respondents: "Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?":

- I am waiting to be sexually active until I'm married.
- It's very difficult for young people to get birth control or condoms.
- I would not have sex without using some form of birth control or condoms.
- I would not get birth control or condoms because someone might see it and know I was having sex.
- I don't think I could get pregnant.
- I don't think young people who have sex really have to worry about getting AIDS.
- Boys don't like condoms.

Attitudes about pregnancy were assessed by asking respondents how they would feel if they became pregnant at their current age ("happy"/ "happy and upset"/ "upset") and asking them to respond "yes," "no," or "don't know" to differing sets of statements, depending on how they said they would feel. Because the number of respondents who said they would be unconditionally "happy" was so small (N=18), only those girls who said they would be "upset" or "happy and upset" were included in these analyses. Respondents who said they would be "upset" or "happy and upset" were asked: "Why would you feel upset to be pregnant?" and could answer "yes," "no," or "don't know" to these statements:

- My future would be limited.
- It is against my religion to have premarital sex.
- I am not ready for the responsibility of caring for a baby.
- I would gain weight.
- My parents would be upset.
- My boyfriend would be upset.
- My friends would be upset.

Because none of the girls in the Commonwealth Fund Survey sample was asked if she were already sexually active or had ever been pregnant, it is unfortunately impossible to assess to what degree their responses to questions about sexual attitudes and hypothetical pregnancies were affected by actual sexual experiences.

Demographic characteristics used as control variables included *race*, *grade in school*, *parental education*, and *family financial status*. *Race* was divided into white/nonwhite categories. "White" included Caucasian and Hispanic/Latino-white. "Nonwhite" included black or African-American, Hispanic/Latino-black, Asian, Asian Indian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Alaskan Native. *Grade in school* included 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th. *Parental education* was divided into neither parent is a college graduate/at least one parent is a college graduate. This variable was created from responses to the question: "What is the highest level of school your mother and father completed?": grade school or some high school; finished high school; some college or special school after high school; finished college; school beyond college. *Family financial status* was based on responses to the question: "For most of the time in your family, which of the following statements describes your family situation?":

- Your family has a hard time getting enough money for food, clothing, and basic living costs.
- Your family has just enough money for food, clothing, and basic living costs.
- Your family has few problems buying what your family needs.
- Your family has no problems buying what your family needs and is able to buy special things.

The first two categories were collapsed into a single variable due to the small number of "hard time getting enough" responses (N=52).

Hypotheses were tested using the Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel chi-square statistic. Logistic regressions were used to introduce demographic control variables. SUDAAN was used for all analyses to adjust for the clustered sampling design (Klein, Wilson, McNulty, Kapphahn & Collins, 1998).

There were significant differences in the quantity of weekly television viewing by race (p=.000), parental education (p=.007), and family financial status (p=.01). Nonwhite girls were twice as likely to be heavy viewers (52%) as white girls (26%), and the mean number of hours of TV viewing per week was about 23 for nonwhites compared to 16 for whites. Girls who had no parent with a college degree were more likely to be heavy viewers (41%) than girls who had at least one parent with a college degree (31%); girls in families experiencing hard times or just getting by economically also were more likely to be heavy viewers (43%) than those in families experiencing few financial difficulties (33%) or no financial difficulties (30%). There were no significant differences in TV viewing frequency by grade in school.

Results

Hypothesis 1: TV viewing and attitudes toward sexual behavior and pregnancy

Of 15 measures of *attitudes toward sexual behavior* and *attitudes about pregnancy*, four were significantly related to television viewing: feeling upset about becoming pregnant because "It is against my religion to have premarital sex," "My friends would be upset," "My boyfriend would be upset," and "I would gain weight." However, only two of these, "religion" ($X^2=8.06$, $p=.02$) and "friends" ($X^2=7.65$, $p=.02$), continued to show a significant relationship with quantity of TV viewing when controlled for race, grade in school, parental education, and income level, and none of the attitudes toward sexual behavior measures were significantly different across viewing groups.

Light viewers were more likely to say they would be upset due to their religious beliefs (40%) than medium viewers (37%) and heavy viewers (30%). TV presents a mostly secular view of the world with little emphasis on religious topics, so heavier viewing and decreased religious values may be suggested by this data. However, because the survey did not ask respondents about their religious beliefs, it was impossible to control for religiosity as a demographic variable. More religious adolescents might be more likely to turn away from television's widespread sexual content and therefore be lighter viewers; directionality is not clear.

Light viewers also were more likely to say they would be upset about becoming pregnant because their friends would be upset (40%) than medium viewers (33%) and heavy viewers (31%). Thus only weak support for TV's cultivation effects on positive attitudes toward pregnancy was found.

What about magazines?

Analyses of the role of magazines as a source of information about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy suggested that magazines may play an important role in the development of adolescent girls' attitudes about pregnancy. Overall, 42% of the girls said they had learned about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy from both TV and magazines. One-fifth (21%) said they had learned about these topics from magazines but not TV. Fewer than 10% said they had learned from TV but not magazines (see Table 1).

Significant differences in media sources of contraceptive learning were found for race and parental education but not for grade in school or family financial status. Nonwhite girls and girls in homes where neither parent had a college degree were more likely to say they had learned about contraceptives, birth control, or preventing pregnancy from TV but not magazines than white respondents. White girls and girls with a college-educated parent were more likely to say they had learned from magazines but not TV.

Table 1 about here

However, within each demographic category, the pattern of learning from TV and magazines remained consistent. In all categories, four to six times as many girls said they had learned about contraception from *both* TV and magazines as said they had learned from TV but *not* magazines.

Hypothesis 2: Magazines and attitudes toward sexual behavior and pregnancy

Only one of seven measures of *attitudes toward sexual behavior* was significantly different among the four media categories of contraception information: "I would not have sex without using some form of birth control or condom." Girls who named TV and magazines as sources of contraception information were more likely to agree with the statement (83%) than those who said they learned about contraception from TV alone (80%).

There was stronger evidence that magazines play a role in high-school girls' attitudes toward getting pregnant (see Table 2). Overall, these girls expressed concern about becoming pregnant at their current age. Almost all girls (92%) said they would be upset because their "future would be limited"; almost as many (85.9%) said they would be upset because their "parents would be upset" and they were "not ready for the responsibility of caring for a baby." Girls who said they learned about contraception, birth control, or pregnancy prevention from magazines — in combination with TV or alone — were consistently more likely to say they would be upset if they became pregnant than those who cited TV but not magazines as a source of contraception knowledge or said they had learned from neither source. Girls who learned about contraception from TV and magazines were more likely to be upset if they became pregnant than those who learned from TV alone for every pregnancy attitude measure.

Table 2 about here

Magazine use also was related to a greater degree of body consciousness. Girls who named magazines and TV or magazines but not TV as sources of contraception information were more likely to cite "I would gain weight" as a downside of getting pregnant than those who named TV alone or neither source.

A multivariate logistic regression analysis to examine the independent effect of using media sources for contraceptive information on attitudes about pregnancy — while controlling for demographic variables — showed significant differences between girls who said they had learned about birth control, contraception, or pregnancy prevention from *both* TV and magazines and girls who said they had learned from *neither* TV nor magazines for five of the seven pregnancy-attitude measures: "My future would be limited," "My parents would be upset," "I'm not ready for the responsibility of caring for a baby," "My boyfriend would be upset," and "I would gain weight" (see Table 3). Demographic data indicated that nonwhites would be less upset about becoming pregnant at their current age for all of these reasons than whites, and significantly less upset for four of the reasons — especially because their "boyfriend would be upset" (OR=.44; 95% CI .32-.61). Girls who had no college-educated parent were significantly less likely than those with at least one college-educated parent to think their "future would be limited" (OR=.60; 95% CI .34-1.08). Age (measured as grade in school) showed a significant effect only on fear that one's "parents would be upset" (OR=.83; 95% CI .69, .99), and family financial status did not have an independent effect on attitudes about pregnancy.

Table 3 about here

Girls who said they had learned about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy from TV and magazines were 1.6 to 3 times more likely than girls who said they had learned from neither medium to say they would be upset if they became pregnant because their "parents would be upset" (OR=3.05), their "future would be limited" (OR=2.59), they "would gain weight" (OR=1.88), they were "not ready for the responsibility of caring for a baby" (OR=1.76), and their "boyfriend would be upset" (OR=1.62). Interestingly, girls who said they got this information from magazines but not TV were 1.75 times as likely as those who said they learned from neither source to say they would be upset to get pregnant because of weight gain.

Overall, the information about contraception, birth control, and pregnancy prevention acquired by teen girls from magazines does appear to have a complementary or even augmentative effect on information learned from television; girls who learn about these topics from both magazines and TV are more likely to be upset at the idea of getting pregnant than those who say they learn only from TV.

Discussion and Conclusions

Traditional cultivation theory, where effects are based on the quantity of undifferentiated television viewing, as tested in Hypothesis 1, was only minimally supported in these analyses. Data indicated little relationship between *attitudes toward sexual behavior* and increased viewing of television's consistently salacious content. The one measure of *attitudes toward sexual behavior* that approached (but did not achieve) a significant relationship with quantity of television viewing — "I would not get birth control or condoms because someone might see it and know I was having sex" — may be related to research findings that references to STDs or pregnancy prevention are frequently presented in a joking context on television (Lowry & Shidler, 1993). If television does provide socializing messages about sexuality and pregnancy, as some have argued (Roberts, 1982), these data suggest that the degree of influence is not related to simply how much television a teen watches.

This reflects what some critiques of Gerbner's original model of cultivation effects have argued: Cultivation of specific perceptions in viewers may be more related to watching certain genres of television programs than to undifferentiated television exposure (Hawkins & Pingree, 1981; Potter & Chang, 1990; Rubin, Perse & Taylor, 1988). Our data from testing Hypothesis 2 also suggest that the cultivation effects of one medium such as TV may be interacting with those of other media. In this case, magazines appear to be an important source of information about contraception and pregnancy prevention and may exert a more powerful influence than television. Respondents who learned about contraception from both TV and magazines consistently said they would be more likely to be upset at the idea of getting pregnant than those who learned from TV alone.

Researchers need to be more precise about how the media are being used by adolescents, looking beyond TV to include media such as music, movies, and print. Publications aimed at female readers ages 12-24 such as *Seventeen* and *YM* , for example, each have circulation figures of more than 2 million (Fischer, 1997).

This suggests two things: 1) Magazines may be doing a better job than television of communicating the consequences of unplanned pregnancies and importance of contraception to adolescent girls, and 2) learning from magazines may interact with learning from TV to augment viewers' receptivity to responsible messages about pregnancy and contraception presented by television programs, despite the preponderance of irresponsible messages. These explanations reflect the greater percentage of content devoted to sexual health topics that has been found in magazines than in television (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1997; 1999). Even after controlling for demographic variables, a higher percentage of high school girls in every demographic category reported learning from magazines than from TV. Overall, the percentage of girls who said they would be upset if they became pregnant at this age was highest among those who had learned from magazines but not TV.

Further, a multivariate analysis of independent media effects controlling for demographic differences strongly suggests that learning about contraception and responsible sexual attitudes from magazines is not strictly a racially or class-based phenomenon, but rather is related to the magazines' content. Girls who cited TV but not magazines as a source of contraceptive information expressed about the same degree of upset about the effects of an unplanned pregnancy as girls who did not cite either medium. However, whenever magazines were involved as a learning source, girls consistently expressed more concern.

The high level of concern about unplanned pregnancy among girls who said they acquired contraception knowledge from both TV and magazines — as well as the dominance of both TV and magazines as information sources across all demographic categories — suggests that most high school girls may be active "information seekers" who do not limit their learning about sexual issues to any one medium such as TV, but rather consult whatever sources are available. Overall, this study indicates that there is a relationship between learning about birth control, contraception, or pregnancy prevention from media and attitudes toward pregnancy.

These findings also raise questions about the best way to promote public health policies to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and STDs among teen girls. Public service announcements typically have taken a "fight fire with fire" approach, using commercials to counter other TV messages. A more effective television strategy might involve increased partnerships between the producers of entertainment programs and organizations dedicated to promoting responsible sexual attitudes, such as Advocates for Youth and the Kaiser Family Foundation, which have been working with writers and producers together to create "edutainment" in which sexually responsible messages are woven into the storylines of programs popular among adolescents without the preachiness associated with PSAs. However, this study suggests that promoting greater use of magazines as sources of contraceptive information among adolescent girls may be a more effective media strategy than using television alone. Magazines were cited as sources of contraceptive information in this study by more high school age girls (63%) than television (52%). As part of a media diet of messages promoting responsible sexual behavior, magazines seem to be more nutritious than TV.

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Table 1: Demographic characteristics (percents) of the sample by use of TV and/or magazines as information sources about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy

Demographic variables		TV but not magazines	TV & magazines	Magazines but not TV	Neither TV nor magazines	Chi-square	p value
Grade						13.12	(ns)
9th	(N = 408)	11.9	36.9	21.5	29.7		
10th	(397)	8.4	47.4	27.0	22.2		
11th	(430)	9.2	42.9	18.8	29.1		
12th	(317)	6.1	42.7	22.4	28.2		
Race						17.50	0007
White	(993)	7.4	42.1	24.0	26.5		
Nonwhite	(534)	12.9	43.5	15.7	27.9		
Parental education						10.38	02
No college degrees	(421)	12.1	39.6	18.7	29.6		
At least one parent with college degree	(1,047)	7.5	44.8	22.7	25.1		
Family financial status						5.59	(ns)
Hard times just getting by	(361)	9.8	45.3	20.2	24.7		
Few problems	(464)	9.7	43.3	18.2	28.7		
No problems	(696)	8.4	41.3	23.9	26.3		
Total percent (avg. across dem. variables)		9.0	42.0	21.0	27.0		

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Table 2: Pregnancy attitudes (percent agreeing) by use of TV and/or magazines as information sources about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy

Pregnancy attitudes	[N]	TV but not magazines	TV & magazines	Magazines but not TV	Neither TV nor magazines	Total	Chi-square/p value
Would be upset if became pregnant at this age	1,643	58.0	66.6	68.7	60.6	64.6	20.50/.00
Why upset?							
My future would be limited	1,386	89.2	95.5	91.0	87.9	92.0	4.91/.03
My parents would be upset	1,386	82.7	92.0	84.3	78.3	85.9	8.96/.00
Not ready for the responsiblity of caring for a baby	1,386	83.8	89.3	85.6	81.0	85.9	4.12/.04
Premarital sex is against my religion	1,386	30.2	39.4	36.9	30.7	35.8	5.06/.03
My friends would be upset	1,386	29.3	42.0	32.4	27.0	35.0	7.20/.01
Boyfriend would be upset	1,386	25.4	39.9	35.9	27.5	27.5	9.95/.00
Would gain weight	1,386	20.6	31.3	29.6	20.0	27.1	14.18/.00

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Table 3: **Pregnancy attitudes (percent agreeing) by use of TV and/or magazines as information sources about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy controlling for demographic variables (logistical regression)**

Why would be upset if became pregnant at this age?	**My future would be limited**		**My parents would be upset**		**Not ready for responsibility of caring for baby**		**My boyfriend would be upset**		**I would gain weight**	
	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Variable Value										
Race										
White	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--
Nonwhite	.61	(.42,.90)*	.81	(.57,1.15)	.63	(.44,.91)*	.44	(.32,.61)***	.73	(.54,.99)*
Parental education										
No college degrees	.60	(.34,1.08)*	1.15	(.76,1.74)	.83	(.55,1.25)	.74	(.52,1.04)	1.02	(.74,1.41)
At least one parent with college degree	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--
Family financial status										
Hard times just getting by	.48	(.27,.87)	.57	(.34,.94)	.64	(.41,1.00)	.87	(.61,1.24)	.79	(.54,1.14)
Few problems	.73	(.43,1.22)	.76	(.52,1.11)	.91	(.58,1.41)	1.03	(.74,1.44)	.79	(.57,1.10)
No problems	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--	1.00	--

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

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Table 3 (cont'd): Pregnancy attitudes (percent agreeing) by use of TV and/or magazines as information sources about birth control, contraception, or preventing pregnancy controlling for demographic variables (logistical regression)

Why would be upset if became pregnant at this age?	**My future would be limited**		**My parents would be upset**		**Not ready for responsibility of caring for baby**		**My boyfriend would be upset**		**I would gain weight**	
	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Variable Value										
Grade	.89	(.71,1.10)	.83	(.69,.99)*	1.05	(.90,1.23)	1.09	(.95,1.24)	.99	(.88,1.10)
Media contraception info. sources										
TV, not mags.	1.06	(.54,2.11)	1.32	(.72,2.44)	1.29	(.65,2.54)	.95	(.54,1.68)	1.20	(.64,2.23)
TV and mags.	2.59	(1.58,4.25)**	3.05	(1.89,4.92)***	1.76	(1.14,2.68)*	1.62	(1.16,2.25)*	1.88	(1.32,2.67)***
Mags., not TV	1.22	(.71,2.11)	1.60	(.99,2.58)	1.12	(.64,1.97)	1.43	(.95,2.16)	1.75	(1.17,2.62)**
Neither TV nor mags.	1.00	–	1.00	–	1.00	–	1.00	–	1.00	–

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

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CHANGES IN FEMALE ROLES IN TAIWANESE WOMEN'S MAGAZIENS, 1971-1992

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Abstract

A thematic content analysis performed on a sample of articles published in Woman and New Woman magazines over the period of 1971 to 1992 revealed a decline in the number having themes of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers and an increase in articles with political, social and economic themes. Traditional sex role models, however, still dominate the pages of most women's magazines.

CHANGES IN FEMALE ROLES IN TAIWANESE WOMEN'S MAGAZIENS, 1971-1992

Introduction

One of the most important arguments that feminist scholars have made has been that the image of women is a "construction." As this argument goes, the image of women is a product of culture, and the image is exactly what it is only because of the society which spawns it. As Jane Gaines (1990) argues, this position has been important "as it has helped to clear up the confusion caused by the success of the moving image at putting itself over as the same as the reality to which it refers," and the work cut out for feminist communication researchers has been "the continual rescue of this image which tends to dissolve into a mist of naturalness -- to hold it up for further scrutiny, and to make its constructedness evident -- to turn it inside out so that the stitching shows" (p. 1).

Mass media is one of social institutions that play a role in the construction of femininity. In discussing the central roles that mass media play in contemporary society, Kellner (1988) points out,

> Radio, television, film and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; of "us" and "them." Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values; what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture...We are immersed from cradle to grave in a media and consumer society (p. 5).

Women's magazines comprise part of a web of societal institutions that deal in and promulgate values and attitudes. The tradition of women's magazines have sought to instruct women in appropriate conduct for living. In women's culture, consumer magazines hold a preeminent position. They are powerful representations of women's lives. A woman in Western culture has learned from studying the publicity images of other women in the pages of women's magazines -- Elle, Seventeen, Vogue, Jackie, and Mademoiselle. In this sense she is what she reads. This continuity between woman and women's magazines works especially well to keep women in their traditional place.

Although feminists have now produced a considerable body of research on Western women's magazines, little attention has been paid to women's magazines in Third World countries. This neglect is a serious omission considering the range of titles which now target Third World women. In Taiwan, for example, the number of women's periodicals has been growing rapidly. In 1986, there were seventy women's magazines. By 1993, the number had increased by 44.3 percent, with thirty-one more titles in 1993 than in 1986. This increased market reflects not only the growth in women's disposable income, but also the commidification of female culture following the economic development of Taiwan since 1960s (Shaw, 1997).

Because of their prominence in women's lives, it is important to examine what women's magazines present and address to women. This study examines how sociocultural context influences the portrayal of women's image in Taiwanese women's magazines over the past twenty years. This study was performed by subjecting a collection of articles from two women's magazines published between 1971 and 1992 to a content analysis of the trend of the data over time. I expected that there would be a shift in the focus of the articles appearing after the social changes in Taiwan since 1980s when compared with the articles published before this time.

Background: Women's role and Status in Taiwan

Women in traditional Chinese society existed mainly to supply male heirs (Koo, 1985). As Li (1988) noted, "Few societies in history have prescribed for women a more lowly status or treated them in a more routinely brutal way than traditional Confucian China" (p. 5). Discrimination against women was institutionalized within all the usual structures of Taiwan's society: family, the economy, education, culture and the political system (Gallin, 1984a, 1984b; Greenhalgh, 1985; Cheng and Hsiung, 1993). Take the family for example: an authoritarian hierarchy based on gender, generation and age dominated life within the family in Taiwan. The oldest male had the highest status; women's status, although it increased with the birth of sons and age, was lower than that of any man (Gallin, 1984a).

However, in the 1960s Taiwan's economy began to take off, and the status of women have been greatly affected by that. Gallin (1984b) summarizes the economic transformation of Taiwan in the last thirty years. Initially the government strengthened agriculture in order to provide a base for industrialization, pursued an import substitution policy in the 1950s, and then followed a policy of export-oriented industrialization. Extremely rapid growth in industry caused incomes in Taiwan to skyrocket -- from US$50 per year in 1950 to US$200 in 1964 to more than US$3,000 by the mid-1980s. The annual per capita income in Taiwan passed US$10,000 in 1992.

Women have benefited from the industrialization of Taiwanese society in terms of educational opportunities and employment options. Well aware of the links between education and development, in 1953 the government made six years of primary education free and compulsory, and in 1968-69, it added three more years (junior middle school) of free schooling. The expansion of educational opportunities was reflected in a phenomenal increase in school attendance at every level. Though the number of girls attending school initially lagged behind boys, especially in the upper level, the gap between the sexes narrowed rapidly. In 1951, only 37 percent of all Taiwanese students were female; less than 27 percent were in high school, and only ten percent of college undergraduates were female. By 1993, almost half of all students were female (Hsieh, 1985).

Economic development also brought an explosion of job opportunities for women, followed by a massive entry of women into the labor force. In the past, few women were employed outside the home. In 1961, 35.8 percent had other jobs. In 1990, the figure was 44.5 percent -- about the same percentage as in the United States and the countries of Western Europe. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that 42.5 percent of married women work. However, the occupational distribution in Taiwan still reflects very significant gender segregation. Women suffer decidedly from wage discrimination: their earnings were about 71 percent of that of men in 1988 (Tsai, 1993). Moreover, women generally remain excluded from the top levels of ownership and administrative-managerial positions, while they are grossly overpresented at the bottom of the occupational ladder as unpaid family helpers. Many women in agriculture appear trapped in a declining sector by their age and lack of education, and many younger women factory workers still remain within the traditional patriarchal and exploitive system (Chou, 1990).

In addition, women's movement in Taiwan has developed since the 1970s. But, in the beginning, due to the limits of martial law, it was impossible at that time for women to change the patriarchal structure in an organized way. Taiwanese women did not begin to organize as a social movement until 1982 when the first feminist magazine Awakening was established by Lee Yuan-chen. The movement has attacked the pardoning of men who kill wives suspected of adultery, exposed rape, sought new divorce laws and the protection of teenage prostitutes, and successfully resisted the construction of a dangerous chemical plant (Ku, 1987). Some of these changes are captured in the masthead of the journal Women-ABC, which once meant "adorable, beautiful, contemporary" but now means "assertive, beautiful, and creative" (Chiang and Ku, 1985, p. 37).

In sum, it is obvious that Taiwanese women's social and economic status has improved significantly over the last few decades. But their Status is still not quite equal to that of men.

Literature Review

Women's magazines, as Shevelow (1989) argues, attempt to exert influence as a purveyor of values through their direct engagement with their readers' lives. They provide implicitly normative accounts of social structure and behavior. In regard to the representation of women, the periodicals play a decidedly normative role. Ferguson (1983) also argues that women's magazines collectively comprise a social institution which help to shape both a woman's view of herself, and society's view of her. In promoting "a cult of femininity" these journals are not only reflecting the female role in society; they are also supplying one source of definitions of, and socialization into, that role.

Most scholars accept the fact that women's magazines have been instrumental in socializing women and in creating an image of the idealized woman, whether or not they approve of the editorial content of these publications. One feminist writer who roundly criticizes these magazines for inventing and perpetuating a feminine mythology is Betty Friedan. Her book, The Feminine Mystique, published in 1963, criticized women's magazines for helping to create and promulgate the "problem that has no name." Friedan suggested that the post-World War II era had seen the rise of a "feminine mystique," whereby women were fulfilled only in their domestic service to others. And magazines were one of the major purveyors of this mystique: "In the magazine image," Friedan wrote, "women do no work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man (p. 30)."

There are several studies that corroborate the fact that women's magazines have been instrumental in perpetuating the feminine mystique. For example, the study of Flora (1971) reports that women's magazines fiction, as a rule, reinforces the concept of passive females. Franzwa's study in 1974 compares government statistics on women who work outside the home to those that appear in a sample of stories taken from some women's magazines during the years 1940 and 1970. In her sample Franzwa discovered that the one constant in all the stories was that of defining women in terms of men; that is, the women were portrayed in one of the following four roles: "single and looking for a husband; housewife-mother; spinster; widowed or divorced -- soon to remarry." Notably not one married woman had a job outside the home. As Franzwa remarks, all these images of women in magazine fiction contradict reality, as in 1967, for example, 37 percent of married women held paying jobs.

Indeed, the women's press sometimes has served as a powerful factor in influencing women to resist social change. Mickish and Searles (1984), who have examined images of female gender roles at the turn of the century, argue that the media "influenced people's conception of reality and guided them in the process of constructing attitudes and action." Analyzing fiction in the Ladies Home Journal during 1905, they found only conventional images projected. Women are seen as traditional "good-hearted, self-sacrificing people, embracing their "natural" roles as wives and mothers. Subtly, the Journal discouraged any social change that would alter their idealized status. The implicit assumption in the fiction is that love will overcome all obstacles, problems, and miscommunications. Independence and career are seen as undesirable for women.

Looking at women's magazines from a slightly different angle, Tortora (1973) concludes that the magazines have found it in their best interests to provide editorial commentary on contemporary women's issues. Although these magazines have not always taken a liberal or progressive stance, they have offered their opinions on education for women, universal suffrage, and minimum wages. As an exception to this patter, however, Tortora notes that fashion magazines did not acknowledge the rapid changes in women's roles that characterized the period from 1930s to 1960. Tortora explains this fact by pointing out that the questions raised by working mothers are irrelevant to the needs of the fashion industry, observing that these magazines present only the "image" of the liberated woman, not her "substance".

Prisco (1982) analyzed issues of Mademoiselle from 1970 to 1980. She found that the American woman revealed in this fashion magazine is educated, ambitious, career-oriented, independent, successful, and believes she should look well. In general, Prisco concluded that "through the 1970s, Mademoiselle has reflected this changing woman in a changing society."

Loughlin (1981) analyzed issues of Good Housekeeping, Ladies Home Journal, and McCall's from 1979 to 1981 and found the typical adult female character to be attractive and happily married, between 26 and 35, with two children living in a house in the city. She was college-educated, middle-class, held a job outside the home, and was concerned "with family-oriented problems that were psychological in nature." The job outside the home was considered secondary and, in fact, was often not identified at all. "In general, fictional characters are younger, better educated and have fewer children than their real life counterparts."

Demarest and Garner (1992) performed a thematic content analysis on articles published in the Ladies Home Journal and Good Housekeeping magazines over the period of 1954 to 1982. Their study revealed a gradual decline in the number having themes of women as wives, mothers, and homemakers, and an increase in articles with political, social and economic themes. Traditional sex roles, however, still dominate the pages of most women's magazines.

Methodology

For analysis, I selected Woman magazine (1968-1994) and New Women (1970-) because they have been in publication since at least 1970, and they are monthly magazines with a wide circulation. The two magazines are aimed at different readers and have different editorial content. Woman reached middle-class women, including home makers and working wives, and had a circulation of about 10,000-15,000 by 1976. While the major topics for most of its articles were about infant care and child-rearing, dress patterns and recipes, beauty and grooming tips, home medical advice, and the method to achieve marital happiness and successful family life, the feminist thoughts discussed in a few of its articles published in the 1970s were quite significant at that time. New Woman was small in size, and targeted to working-class women, and their appeal was founded on covering the lives of movie stars and singers; fashion and beauty; romance; problems with love; relationships between friends, lovers, colleagues, as well as bosses and workers; hygiene and health; and in particular, sex (Shaw, 1997).

The July issue of Woman and New Woman were examined for every three years between 1970 and 1994. Eight issues of each magazine were analyzed from the years 1971, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989, and 1992. In all, 607 articles in 16 issues of the magazines were exmained for this study.

Based on Ku's (1987) chronology of the women's movement in Taiwan, the period from the late 1970s to the early 1980s can be considered the revitalization of the most recent feminist movement. Therefore, in order to examine any content differences based on the women's movement, this study will compare four subgroups of the sample: (1) Woman (1971-1980); (2) New Woman (1971-1980); (3) Woman (1981-1992); (4) New Woman (1981-1992).

The selected magazines were subjected to a thematic content analysis. All the nonadvertising content in each magazine was categorized according to preselected themes based on the previous studies of Prisco (1982), Demarest and Garner (1992), and Shaw (1997). Twelve coding categories comprised the following themes:

1. beauty and fashion (e.g., cosmetic application, hairstyles, clothing, accessories);
2. marriage and family (e.g., marriage, love, child care);
3. efficient homemaker (e.g., home decorating, budgeting, do-it-yourself, helpful cleaning hint, cooking and recipes, sewing);
4. interpersonal relations;

5. health (e.g., fitness, weight loss, diet, nutrition, medicine, illness);
6. sex;
7. entertainment (e.g., celebrities, male and female stars, movies, books, music, arts);
8. political and social awareness (e.g., legislative action, social programs, social issues);
9. career development (e.g., job interview techniques, resume writing, management style);
10. personal growth and development (other than career, fitness, or beauty);
11. travel and vacation;
12. profile;
13. a category labeled general interest, which included any other content.

Each article was coded according to these themes by two independent raters. Intercoder reliability was calculated for 64 articles in sample issues. The value was 0.75.

Results

The number of articles in each of the thematic categories was tabulated separately for each ten-year period since 1971. The two periods represent the decade preceding the initiation of the feminist movement (1971-1981), and the decade of growing awareness of and interest in the movement (1982-1992). Table 1 lists the percentage of editorial space given to 13 topics in the selected issues of Woman and New Woman from 1971 to 1992. In all time periods, beauty and fashion makes up 14.2% of the editorial content for Woman, efficient homemaker takes up another

12.2%, and most surprisingly, the category political and social awareness comprises 10.6%. Marriage and family makes up about 27.1% of the editorial space for New Woman, beauty and fashion 23.5%, and health 8%. The categories least represented in the pages of Woman were sex (0.4%), interpersonal relation (3.3%), career development (3.3%), and personal growth and development (3.7%). In New Woman, the least represented categories were political and social awareness (0.8%), travel and vacation (1.4%), and personal growth and development (1.7%).

From 1971 to 1981 the theme of beauty and fashion accounted for 20.2% of Woman articles, but between 1982 and 1992 this dropped to 9.1%. The category efficient homemaker, however, remained the same percentage about 12% of Woman space over the two periods. Marriage and family changed from 4.4% to 9.1% over the years. In contrast, the theme related to political and social awareness increased from 5.3% to 15.2% of Woman content. Articles on career development changed from 1.8% to 4.5% over the periods.

In New Woman, the category marriage and family decreased from 35.5% in the 1971-1981 time period, to 18.3% in the period between 1982 and 1992. However, beauty and fashion increased from 17.2% to 30.3%, and efficient homemaker from 1.6% to 6.9% over the years. Few articles on the themes of political and social awareness, career development, and personal growth and development ever appeared in New Woman.

These data are shown by the two time periods in Table 2 for the combined categories of traditional themes (including beauty and fashion, marriage and family, and efficient homemaker), and nontraditional themes (including political and social awareness, career development, and personal growth and development). Traditional themes decreased from 36.9% of the articles appearing in Woman in the 1971-1981 period to 30.3% in the period between 1982 and 1992, but they remained the same percentage about 55% in the content of New Woman. Feminist themes increased from 11.5% to 19.7% of Woman, and from 3.8% to 6.9% of New Woman.

Chi-square statistics were calculated for the data in Table 2. For Woman, the proportion of traditional and nontraditional articles changed significantly from the first decade to the second decade, $X^2(1, N=125)=4.23$, $p<0.05$. However, the data for New Woman did not reach conventional levels of significance, $X^2(1, N=217)=0.88$, $p>0.05$.

Further to Illustrate the article content thrust of Woman and New Woman, Table 3 presents examples of articles by title in salient categories for this study, including the total number of articles per category across all issues of the two magazines. Although titles can be misleading, aptness disparity was generally low. Moreover, it was clear that most titles were phrased to capture the attention of female readers. Titles themselves often conveyed dualistic messages across issues, as indicated by articles such as "How to Make You Look Beautiful" (New Woman, July 1971), "The Easy Way to Cook" (Woman, July 1974), "The New Woman Man Loves" (New Woman, July 1986), in contrast to "To Share Housework between Husband and Wife" (Woman, July 1983), and "To Lead a Happy Single Life" (Woman, July 1986).

Discussion

The main question addressed in this research was whether the format of traditional women's magazines would reflect the changing roles of women in Taiwanese society. It is not surprising that women's magazines in Taiwan transmitted much more traditional messages to readers than nontraditional ones. Both middle-class and working-class magazines functioned largely to reflect and reinforce traditional sex role stereotypes, in which youth and good looks were emphasized and women were defined by the children and men in their lives. While the middle-class magazines contain some articles suggesting broader social horizons for women (such as the articles about work and political awareness), these articles are less common than those indicating a more passive or vicarious female role. The middle-class magazines appear to walk a line between presenting messages for a liberated woman, and messages for a reader who is still traditional. This finding mirrors MacLachlan's (1974) observations of Mexican women's magazines that:

> The conclusion one is forced to draw from a study of women's magazines is that the modern Mexican middle-class female is in an inferior position. The demands of modernization have modified her status and opened up various questions but to a surprisingly limited degree.

In general, it appears that the changing image of women in women's magazines has been class specific in Taiwan. The results revealed opposite trends between the images of women in working class and middle-class magazines from 1971 to 1992. Woman, the magazine with middle-class audience, were more responsive to changes in women's roles, whereas women in working-class magazine, like New Woman, remained more passive and traditional images over time.

The Taiwanese feminist movement, which was influenced by the U.S. women's movement in the 1960s, was directed toward middle-class women. Due to the limits of martial law, however, it was impossible for women to change the patriarchal structure in an organized way. Therefore, some mass media, those more sensitive to the changing social structure, became mediators of the thoughts of "new feminism" and "women's rights." One of these was Woman, which published some important articles on the development of the women's movement including "Should Male-Centered Society Come to an End?" (May 1973), "Women Still Have Less Privileges than Men" (January 1976), "Be a Human First, and Then Be a Woman" (March 1976), "The Movement for Women's Rights cannot be Avoided" (April 1977), and "How Taiwanese Women Look at The Movement for Women's Rights" (May 1979). As Carden (1974) and Freeman (1975) argued, increased media coverage of issues and events concerning the women's movement has raised the awareness of many who had overlooked or were not knowledgeable about these issues. Thus the expansion od media coverage may have accelerated the growth of the movement, especially among the middle class (Flora, 1979). However, the stance of feminism in Woman is intriguing, because the magazine still adopted a skeptical point of view in observing the development of women's movement. For instance, in an article entitled "What Women Got in the Sexual Liberation Movement" in the issue November 1975 of Woman, the author argues that the women's movement in Great Britain has lead to some terrible "disasters," such as women's alcoholism, abortion, divorce, and others.

Changes in the female role depicted in American magazines marketed for middle-class women, such as Redbook from 1955 to 1976, as well as Ladies Home Journal and Good Housekeeping from 1954 to 1983, revealed a similar parallel with changes in American society (Geise, 1979; Demarest and Garner, 1992). Flora (1979) compared the images of women in working-class and middle-class magazines from 1970 to 1975 and found opposite trends. This research provides some support to the findings of the studies in the United States.

This study did not compare the data with the portrayal of women in other media, but from other literature on Taiwan's media it would appear that women's periodicals have changed more rapidly. Newspapers, no matter what kind of ownership they have, continued to underrepresent women and portray them "in her place" in the period between 1961 and 1990 (Weng, 1994). The image of women on TV dramas has still remained dependent, silent, indecisive, stupid and passive (Nieu, 1982). As Tuchman (1978) argued, magazines change to reflect the changing interests of their reading audience.

Women's magazines in Taiwan seem to be sensitive to changes in society, but they are also slow to change, perhaps because of their own economic constraints. Thus, it would seem that, despite more than 20 years of awareness of women's movement, the image and the reality of women's roles as depicted in women's magazines are still far apart.

Table 1: The Percentage of Articles in Two Periods of Woman and New Woman Categorized by Thematic Content

	Magazine and period of publication				Total			
	1971- 1981		1982- 1992		Woman		New Woman	
Theme	Woman	New Woman	Woman	New Woman	%	N	%	N
Beauty & fashion	20.2	17.2	9.1	30.3	14.2	35	23.5	85
Marriage & family	4.4	35.5	9.1	18.3	6.9	17	27.1	98
Efficient homemaker	12.3	1.6	12.1	6.9	12.2	30	4.2	15
Interpersonal relations	1.8	7.5	4.5	1.7	3.3	8	4.7	17
Health	9.6	8.6	6.1	7.4	7.7	19	8.0	29
Sex	0.9	12.4	0	2.9	0.4	1	7.8	28
Entertainment	9.6	2.2	8.3	9.7	8.9	22	5.8	21
Political & social awareness	5.3	0	15.2	1.7	10.6	26	0.8	3
Career development	1.8	2.7	4.5	2.9	3.3	8	2.8	10
Personal growth & development	4.4	1.1	0	2.3	3.7	9	1.7	6
Travel & vacation	0.9	0	6.8	2.9	4.1	10	1.4	5
Profile	10.5	2.7	10.6	4.6	10.6	26	3.6	13
General interest	18.4	8.6	10.6	8.6	14.2	35	8.6	31
Total number of articles per period	114	186	132	175		246		361

Table 2: The Percentage of Articles in Two Periods Given to Traditional Themes and Nontraditional Themes in Woman and New Woman

	Woman		New Woman	
	1971-1981	1982-1992	1971-1981	1982-1992
Traditional Themes	36.9	30.3	54.3	55.5
Nontraditional themes	11.5	19.7	3.8	6.9

Table 3: Illustrative Article Titles from Woman and New Woman by Identity Theme Category

Category	Title
Beauty & Fashion	"How to Make You Look Beautiful" (New Woman, July 1971)
	"Famous Fashion Designers in New York" (Woman, July 1977)
	"How to Choose a Suitable Swimsuit" (New Woman, July 1983)
	"What's Wrong with Your Hair" (Woman, July 1983)
	"The Ways to Reduce Your Weight Based on Your Personality" (New Woman, July 1986)
Marriage & Family	"Will Your Boyfriend Become Your Husband" (New Woman, July 1977)
	"The New Woman Man Loves" (New Woman, July 1986)
	"How to Tell If It Is True Love or Not" (New Woman, July 1989)
Efficient Homemaker	"The Easy Way to Cook" (Woman, July 1974)
	"The Ways for Housewives to Save Electrical Power" (Woman, July 1980)
	"How to Be a Housewife with Creativity" (Woman, July 1983)
Political & Social Awareness	"How the Role of American Women has Changed in 25 Years" (Woman, July 1977)
	"Female Lawmakers should Speak For Women"(Woman, July 1983)

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Public Trust or Mistrust?: Perceptions of Media Credibility in the Information Age

By

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Public Trust or Mistrust?: Perceptions of Media Credibility in the Information Age

Abstract

This paper explores perceptions of news credibility for television, newspapers, and online news. A survey was administered to a randomly selected sample of residents in Austin, Texas, to assess people's attitudes toward these three media channels. Contingent factors that might influence news credibility perceptions, such as media use and interpersonal discussion of news, were also incorporated into the analysis. Findings suggest that people are generally skeptical of news emanating from all three media channels but do rate newspapers with the highest credibility, followed by online news, and television news respectively. Furthermore, opinions about news credibility seem to be correlated across media outlets. The data show a moderate linkage between interpersonal discussion of news and perceptions of media credibility for television news but not for newspapers and online news. Finally, a marginal association between media use and public perceptions of credibility for newspapers and television was found but not for online news.

Public Trust or Mistrust?: Perceptions of Media Credibility in the Information Age

Background

Introduction

Media credibility research has been an integral part of mass communication scholarship since the field's earliest days. Whereas the seminal work on credibility concentrated on dimensions of source credibility (e.g., Hovland & Weiss, 1951), more contemporary literature has highlighted variations in the perceived credibility attributed to different channels (e.g., Rimmer & Weaver, 1987). Despite this expanded scope in research, the realm of online news has just recently been explored in media credibility analyses (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Though helpful, such inquiries are restricted because they have normally been based on samples of Internet users. Indeed, Johnson & Kaye (1998), who performed a survey of news credibility on politically interested online users, recommend that "future studies could be conducted among the general population to determine the degree to which the Internet is viewed as credible and whether it is indeed judged as more trustworthy than traditionally delivered counterparts" (p. 335). Accordingly, the purpose of this project is to ascertain how credible people believe online news to be in comparison to television and print news through a probability sample of the general population in one city.

To answer this broad research question, a survey was administered to a randomly selected sample of residents in Austin, Texas, to assess people's perceptions of news credibility. Specifically, media credibility was gauged by asking respondents how they rated news from television, newspapers, and the Internet in terms of factuality, profit making, privacy, community well-being, and trustworthiness. Contingent factors that might affect perceptions of news credibility were also examined, including media use and interpersonal communication patterns.

Source Credibility

Before delving into more pertinent literature on the credibility of various media channels,[1] it is critical that we review the general literature on source credibility because most studies probing channel credibility are anchored in this fundamental theoretical framework. The earliest research on credibility investigated how modifications in source characteristics influenced people's willingness to alter their attitudes on certain topics (e.g., Hovland et al., 1953; Hovland et al., 1949). Carl Hovland and his associates ran a series of experiments to determine what combinations of communicator qualities induced attitude change in subjects. Usually, the steps involved in their research were measuring subject attitudes on an issue, exposing them to manipulated messages based on different source qualities, and then measuring attitude change after the initial exposure. Source expertise and trustworthiness were envisaged as two central attributes of source credibility.

Source, in these early investigations, was typically defined as an individual mass communicator, such as a newscaster or world leader. However, Hovland et al. (1953) did acknowledge that "the impact of a message probably depends also upon the particular publication or channel through which it is transmitted" (p.19). Therefore, even in these inaugural explorations, researchers differentiated between attitudes toward the communicator and opinions about the medium. This is a pivotal distinction upon which the current project hinges because aspects of source credibility are not to be confused with elements of medium credibility, although the two obviously do overlap.

The mass communication theory that underscored much of the early source credibility work was the two-step flow model of communication. This theory posits that mass media indirectly affect audiences by exerting influence on a few "opinion leaders" in individual communities, who in turn, may shift the attitudes of others within those same communities (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948; Berelson et al., 1954). The relevance of this model to credibility research is that it synthesized how interpersonal communication about news might shape people's perceptions of credibility. It suggests that reliance on interpersonal communication is associated with reliance on mass media, possibly transforming people's perceptions of credibility with the press (a question that will be scrutinized in the current project). It should be mentioned, however, that the two-step flow model has been strongly challenged by scholars (e.g., Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Lin, 1971; Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985), yet is germane because it offers a conceptual base that merges the impact of media exposure and interpersonal discussion onto mass communication processes.

Despite the many contributions flowing from the Hovland Model, scholars soon criticized its vision of source credibility as too simplistic and static (Markham, 1968). Berlo et al. (1970), for instance, presumed that source credibility was "multidimensional" and that the factors identified by Hovland had no theoretical foundation, nor had they withstood the rigors of empirical testing. Through a series of factor analyses of semantic differential scales, Berlo and his colleagues claimed that source credibility entailed safety, qualifications, and dynamism.[2] Meanwhile, Whitehead (1968) added competency and objectivity as vital components of credibility.[3] Indeed, one overarching pattern that has resonated in credibility research is that academics have failed to fully agree on the core dimensions of the concept.

More recent work on source credibility monitors public perceptions of political candidates and individual journalists (e.g., Andsager, 1990; Pfau & Kang, 1991). The primary method for such inquiries has been the controlled experiment in the Hovland tradition. Slater & Rouner (1996), for example, submit that the internal characteristics of messages, such as their aesthetic presentation or their actual content, can also sway perceptions of source credibility. Hence, credibility appears to be a variable that can be studied within the context of the communicator, channel, or message itself. In addition, discussions attempting to deal with the methodological problems of operationalizing the intricate concept continue to linger (Infante, 1980). While a great deal of knowledge has been accumulated from the experimental approach of designating credibility as an attribute of the source, to understand differences in public opinion concerning channel credibility, we must also visit the vast survey research dedicated to this topic.

Medium Credibility

Westley and Severin (1964) are credited with conducting the first comprehensive analysis of news credibility across media outlets. In their classic study, the scholars noted that certain demographic variables (e.g., age, education, & gender) mediate people's perceptions of news credibility. Moreover, they discriminated between perceptions of media credibility and media preference. In other words, people did not always feel their most preferred medium was the most credible. They also found that television news was typically deemed more accurate than print news. Some of the more important issues that surfaced from this examination were: (1) to what extent did media use influence news credibility ratings; (2) was the trend for high television credibility consistent; and (3) were people's general perceptions of credibility uniform across media channels (questions pursued in this study as well).

Media Credibility Scales

Paralleling the literature on source credibility, news media credibility research has also been plagued by methodological concerns. The primary debate revolves around how many factors news credibility scales actually measure. The Gaziano & McGrath (1986) news credibility index is the most popular, although some controversy has been generated from its application. In their initial analysis, Gaziano & McGrath performed a factor analysis that located one dominant factor of news credibility. Meanwhile, Meyer (1988) alleged that their scale actually gauges two properties of news credibility: believability and community affiliation. West (1994), attempting to compare the reliability of both models using covariance structure modeling, found that Meyer's believability dimension was reliable but the community affiliation dimension was not. In addition, West observed that the Gaziano & McGrath scale gauged more than one factor. On the other hand, Rimmer & Weaver (1987) report a Cronbach's alpha score of .90 for a credibility scale based on Gaziano & McGrath's work, implying that it does measure a single construct. Thus, media credibility seems to be a concept that can be measured through a composite index or can be subdivided into several smaller subvariables, depending upon the combination of questions utilized (a problem addressed in the methods section).

Media Use

The early work on news credibility established that increases in media use were usually accompanied by enhanced credibility ratings for whatever channel was being scrutinized (Westley & Severin, 1964; Greenberg, 1966; Shaw, 1973; Cobbey, 1980). In contrast to this previous scholarship, however, Rimmer and Weaver (1987) conjecture that media use is not strongly correlated with media credibility, asserting that the type of question employed to estimate media use may be distorting results. Specifically, they maintain that affective questions of use (e.g., "Which medium do you prefer?") are normally being reported and that actual frequency of media use measures are not necessarily connected with news credibility ratings. Wanta & Hu (1994), in an investigation of agenda setting, found no significant linkage between exposure (frequency of use) and credibility but did find a relationship between reliance (how dependent respondents said they were on a particular medium for information) and credibility.[4] Nevertheless, the impact of media use remains enigmatic, especially considering the rise of interactive media.

Interpersonal Discussion

Since mass media use has been linked to news credibility evaluations, it seems that interpersonal communication behavior would also be relevant to forming such opinions, yet it has only received minimal attention in empirical investigations. Though media use is sometimes positively related to perceptions of news credibility, one might surmise that a similar relationship would exist with interpersonal discussion of news because interpersonal communication behavior is often connected to media use (Atkin, 1972; Chaffee & McLeod, 1973; Lenart, 1994). For example, Kraus & Davis (1976) describe a complementary linkage between mass and interpersonal communication patterns, where people are believed to supplement the information they secure from mass media with similar information from interpersonal channels.

However, the complementary patterns of use do not necessarily lead to parallel perceptions of credibility. In fact, some researchers have concluded that expanded interpersonal communication undermines the influence of mass media on attitudes (e.g., Erbring et al., 1980; Atwater et al., 1985). Specific to credibility, Chaffee (1982) states that "several surveys have reported null or even negative correlations between channel use and credibility; generally interpersonal communication has been more prevalent in these cases" (p.63). Moreover, McLeod et al. (1968-69) concur that interpersonal communication patterns may account for the limited impact of media use on news media credibility. Therefore, the literature suggests that there is an inverse correlation between interpersonal communication and news media credibility, although few studies have ever empirically tested this hypothesis.

Channel Credibility Competition

Several analysts indicate that television news is more credible than newspapers (Carter & Greenberg, 1965; Lemert, 1970; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Indeed, Westley & Severin's (1964) seminal study details that the "Roper's report showed more people believe the news they learn from television than the other media..." (p.325), a trend that has remained relatively stable in Roper polls over time. In a more streamlined study of media credibility and news coverage of natural disasters, Major & Atwood (1997) found that television credibility did not decay in comparison to newspaper credibility when predicted natural disasters failed to occur, hinting that opinions of television credibility may be more stable than newspaper credibility perceptions.

Newhagen & Nass (1989) reason that the discrepancy in credibility ratings is partially caused by the alternative standards people utilize to evaluate television as opposed to newspapers. People tend to judge the journalists delivering the news on television, but they assess the institution of the newspaper itself when analyzing print media. Therefore, opinions of television should be more favorable because survey respondents ally news anchors to television credibility, in contrast to the nameless institution they link with newspaper credibility. In short, Newhagen & Nass (1989) assert that television news credibility is most influenced by local broadcasts, demonstrating that television use might best be calibrated by monitoring both local and national viewing patterns (an approach adopted for this study).

A final factor that may explain the conflicting ratings is the superior technological quality of television news in comparison to print news. As alluded to earlier, Slater & Rouner's (1996) discussion of message quality proposes that peripheral characteristics about messages (e.g., their aesthetic quality) may enhance source credibility. As a result, in the case of television vs. print news, the ascent of television credibility ratings may have mirrored the improvements in the technology of news transmittal over this medium. Of course, the influence of web news (with its blending of newspaper and television news attributes) on media credibility endures as a relatively unchartered frontier.

There is also contradictory evidence with regard to how the credibility of Internet information compares to traditional media, though evidence is scarce at this point. In one of the first investigations of news credibility on the Internet, Johnson & Kaye (1998) documented that online media are perceived as more credible than print media, but both are judged as "somewhat" credible. However, it is difficult to generalize their results because their sample consisted only of politically interested Internet users and because their study focused solely on public affairs information. On the other hand, some research has found traditional media to be judged more credible than the Internet (e.g., Pew Research Center, 1996). Elsewhere, analysts have found mixed evidence concerning the credibility of traditional and online media channels within the same survey (e.g., Mashek et al., 1997). In an experimental setting, Sundar (1998) discovered that the credibility of online news could be enhanced by including quotes in stories (a technique used by traditional media outlets), suggesting that channel credibility perceptions are similar across channels. Due to these inconclusive findings, more empirical work is needed to understand the dynamics of news credibility attitudes across media channels.

Uniformity of Credibility Perceptions

Whereas previous scholarship elucidates that levels of perceived news credibility vary across channels, there is also some evidence that the general direction of these opinions is related. For example, Gaziano & McGrath (1986) and Newhagen & Nass (1989) convey that television and newspaper credibility are positively correlated. Further, Chaffee (1982) and Wanta (1997) articulate that people often seek out mass media with homogeneous content in order to reinforce information they have just learned. As a consequence, this homogeneity in content may partially explain why people's opinions of news credibility are fairly consistent, since the news content they consume is also often homogenous itself. This by no means indicates that such perceptions would be exactly the same, just that they would be correlated.

Mapping out Credibility

According on the discussion above, we see that the boundaries between channel and source credibility are somewhat blurred but are linked given their common conceptual foundation. To sketch out their relationship, we argue that credibility is defined as a characteristic of the media channel, which in turn, is a component of the larger concept of source credibility. This depiction is simultaneously based on the evolution of news credibility research from the larger body of source credibility scholarship and on Hovland et al.'s (1953) contention that source credibility is at least, to some degree, shaped by the channel disseminating the message. Figure 1 illustrates this conceptualization.

--- Figure 1 here ---

This explication is more expansive than prior models (that either do not distinguish between the terms or do not recognize their common theoretical framework) because it allows for a separation of the concepts but admits that they do overlap. Accordingly, this project essentially measures opinions about media channels, but perceptions of individual sources (e.g., news anchors) will inevitably also impact such opinions. Still, we are not exhaustively gauging channel credibility *per se* because not all print, broadcast, and online media are accounted for. While comparing credibility differences within channels would be helpful (e.g., newspapers vs. magazines for print media), we felt the broader channel comparison were more suitable for an exploratory study such as this.

Significance of the Study

One key question that comes to the forefront at this juncture in news credibility research is how will the proliferation of new technologies shift public perceptions of news credibility? Will the credibility of newspapers continue to plummet or will the presence of competing news sources cut into people's trust of television news? The primary contribution of this study will be to focus on such issues. Secondly, it is hoped that this project can also serve as replication for previous trends that have been documented in media credibility research. Ultimately then, this project should bolster our comprehension of news credibility in the information age.

Hypotheses & Research Questions

According to the literature comparing television and newspaper credibility ratings (e.g., Carter & Greenberg, 1965):

H1: Television news will be judged as more credible than newspapers.

Based on the conclusions of Gaziano & McGrath (1986) and Chaffee (1982) regarding people's tendency to seek out homogenous content from mass media:

H2: People's perceptions of news credibility will be positively correlated across all three media.

(Please note that this hypothesis does not contradict Hypothesis 1 because it speculates only on the direction of media credibility ratings, not the differences among them).

Building on the literature suggesting that interpersonal communication behavior reduces trust in media outlets (e.g., McLeod et al., 1968-69):

H3: The amount of interpersonal communication respondents devote to discussing news will be negatively correlated to their perceptions of news credibility.

To assess the relationship between media use and perceived credibility and to provide credibility ratings across media outlets, the following research questions were also advanced:

RQ1: Will media use be related to perceived credibility?

RQ2: Which type of news medium will respondents rate most credible?

Method

Data Collection

The data were obtained from a cross-sectional survey conducted on a sample of randomly selected residents in Austin, Texas, between February 26 and March 8, 1998. Students from two undergraduate and one graduate course administered the survey from the University of Texas at Austin. All students were trained in interviewing protocol and on the ethics of survey research. A technique called "plus-one random digit dialing" was implemented to acquire a representative sample (Poindexter & McCombs, 1997). Specifically, the sample was based on telephone numbers in the "Greater Austin" Southwestern Bell phone book. Respondents were selected by utilizing a computer program that randomly generated page, column, and line numbers in the phone book for interviewers to locate. Once found, 1 was added to the last digit of the base telephone number and the interview was attempted (this step ensured that unlisted phone numbers would also be included in the sample). If unsuccessful, the interviewer would try back up to five times before repeating the process for a new number.

Comparisons to 1990 Census data show that the collected sample adequately represented the area's population (see Appendix A for breakdowns of sample and 1990 Census data). The efficiency of reaching potential households in the survey was 66%.[5] Of those reached, 818 people finished the survey for a completion rate of 61%.[6] All figures fall within acceptable parameters for survey data.

Media Credibility Index

To test the hypotheses and probe the research questions, survey respondents were asked their opinions on news credibility for television, newspapers, and online news. While media credibility has been gauged in several ways, five indicators that consistently emerge in research are: how factual a medium is, the extent to which it is motivated by money, whether it invades people's privacy, what is its concern for the community, and whether it can be trusted (Meyer, 1988; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Wanta, 1997; Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Thus, these items comprised the media credibility index employed for this study. This abbreviated scale was used because some researchers have suggested that the original Gaziano & McGrath scale might be redundant and lengthy (e.g., Meyer, 1988; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987). At the same time, these questions were comprehensive enough to touch on the believability and community affiliation aspects of credibility employed by other scholars (e.g., Meyer, 1988; Wanta & Hu, 1994). For the items mentioned above, a composite index of credibility was created because adequate reliability scores were attained only when aggregating all questions together rather than subdividing them into groups (to be presented below).

In particular, respondents were asked whether they *strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed*, or *strongly disagreed* with the following statements for these media: television news, daily newspapers, and online news. Interviewers asked the questions in the following manner.

We'd like you to think about the DAILY NEWSPAPER you are most familiar with. Please tell me whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with each statement. THE DAILY NEWSPAPER:

Is factual.
Is concerned about making profits.
Invades people's privacy.
Is concerned about the community's well being.
Cannot be trusted.

Now, please tell me whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with these statements about TV news. TV NEWS:

Is factual.

Is concerned about making profits.

Invades people's privacy.

Is concerned about the community's well being.

Cannot be trusted.

Now, please tell me whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with these statements about ONLINE news. ONLINE NEWS:

Is factual.

Is concerned about making profits.

Invades people's privacy.

Is concerned about the community's well being.

Cannot be trusted.

Based on respondent agreement or disagreement with these statements, a four-point Likert scale (0 to 4) was developed for each question to reflect the various aspects of credibility. For example, someone who said they "strongly agreed" with the statement that newspapers were factual would yield a score of 4 for that particular item. These scales were then collapsed into a credibility index for each medium (television, newspaper, and web). Because certain questions were reversed to avoid response sets (Poindexter & McCombs, 1997), items were recoded as necessary so that higher scores would signify higher levels of perceived credibility. Cronbach's alpha for the newspaper, television, and web credibility indices were .60, .63, and .49 respectively. The .49 score for web credibility is probably lower because these scales were originally intended for newspaper and television news, not Internet news.[7]

To measure media use behavior, the following questions were posed to respondents.

About how often do you watch local evening TV news?

1) never or seldom, 2) 1-2 days a week, 3) 3-4 days a week, 4) nearly every day, 5) every day.

About how often do you watch network evening news?

1) never or seldom, 2) 1-2 days a week, 3) 3-4 days a week, 4) nearly every day, 5) every day.[8]

How often would you say you read the daily newspaper?

1) never or seldom, 2) 1-2 days a week, 3) 3-4 days a week, 4) nearly every day, 5) every day.

How often do you use the world wide web?

1) never, 2) 1-5 hours a week, 3) 6-10 hours a week, 4) 11-15 hours a week, 5) 16-20 hours a week, 6) more than 20 hours a week.

(This media use item was worded differently because another researcher involved in the survey was analyzing Internet use in terms hours per week. Hopefully, this should not disturb the current examination because the item still measures frequency of use).[9]

To measure interpersonal discussion of news, the following question was given to participants:

How often do you discuss news with your friends and family?

1) never or seldom, 2) 1-2 days a week, 3) 3-4 days a week, 4) nearly every day, 5) every day.

Thus, each of the items measuring media use and interpersonal communication formed Likert scales for the data analysis phase of the research project.

To ascertain respondent perceptions about the definition of online news, the following question was provided to participants:

When you think of online news, which of these do you most think of?

(1) news websites, (2) news and discussion groups, (3) chatrooms, (4) email listservs, (5) other. (respondents were asked to choose one)

This question was asked to outline what facets of the Internet people considered to be online news.

Data Analysis

For the first hypothesis, a correlated groups t-test was chosen to compare the mean scores of the television and newspaper credibility indices. This test was selected because the assumption of independent samples for an ordinary t-test would have been violated. This allowed us to enjoy the advantages of applying a t-test without resorting to a less powerful statistical procedure.

For Hypotheses 2 and 3 and Research Question 1, Pearson r correlations were utilized to analyze the data. Research Question 2 was analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA test. This test essentially extends the model of the correlated groups t-test and was therefore selected to evaluate all three credibility scales in a simultaneous analysis.

Before continuing, it should be mentioned that significance levels were adjusted for this analysis because of the large sample size. Specifically, because a large sample increases the possibility of Type 1 error (the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it should not be), we adopted a stricter threshold ($p<.001$) for determining statistical significance. As a result, findings at the $p<.05$ or $p<.01$ level were viewed as "approaching" significance or being "marginally" correlated.

Results

Before attending to the specific hypotheses and research questions, it would be beneficial to examine some of the exploratory statistics for the key variables included in the data analysis. Table 1 is offered below to summarize the individual variables.

- - - Table 1 about here - - -

The large number of people who "didn't know" about their opinions toward online news might be explained by the sparse time respondents spent on the Internet despite their 80 percent access rate to it. For example, over half of the sample (62.5 percent) spent less than five hours per week on the web or did not use it at all, limiting their exposure to online news.[10]

To view the range of responses for credibility, the percentage distribution of credibility ratings is presented in Table 2.

- - - Table 2 about here - - -

As far as definitions of online news, the most popular answers were news websites (327 respondents=53%), email listservs (180 respondents=29%), news & discussion groups (52 respondents=8%), chatrooms (36 respondents=6%), and other (28 respondents=5%).[11] Thus, a majority of people agreed on its meaning, but definitions were certainly not unanimous. In essence, this finding indicated that when we asked about people's perceptions of online news, we were mainly monitoring attitudes towards news websites.

H1: Television news will be judged as more credible than newspapers.

According to the descriptive statistics reported above, it appears that this hypothesis was not supported because newspapers were perceived to be more credible than television news (see Table 1), but a correlated groups t-test was also performed to resolve if the difference was statistically significant. The correlated groups t-test show that the difference is indeed significant (t=11.39; df=780; p<.001). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was not supported but was significant in the opposite direction.

H2: People's perceptions of news credibility will be positively correlated across all three media.

Pearson r correlations show that a positive relationship exists between people's opinions of credibility across all three modalities. In particular, the correlation between television and newspaper credibility is .58 (p<.001; n=781). The correlation between television and web news credibility is .45 (p<.001; n=467). Finally, the correlation between newspaper and web news credibility is .43 (p<.001; n=468). As a result, Hypothesis 2 seems to be strongly supported by the data.

H3: The amount of interpersonal communication respondents devote to discussing news will be negatively correlated to their perceptions of news credibility.

Pearson r correlations were again calculated to determine if this inverse relationship exists. Based on the significance level of .001 advanced earlier, interpersonal discussion about news and television credibility appear is only modestly associated (r=-.11; p<.01). No linkage existed between interpersonal discussion about news and perceptions of credibility for newspapers and web news. Thus, the data only moderately confirm Hypothesis 3 for television news credibility but do not for newspaper and web news credibility.

RQ1: Will media use be related to perceived credibility?

The data reveal that newspaper readership is marginally correlated to newspaper credibility (r=.09; p<.05). Likewise, the correlation between viewing local broadcast news and television news credibility is also marginally associated (r=.07; p<.05). Conversely, no linkage occurred between national network news viewing and television credibility. Moreover, no relationship existed between web use and web news credibility. As a consequence, the data display some very small linkages between media use and credibility for local media outlets (i.e., local newspaper and nightly broadcast news), although other variables certainly seem to intervene in the relationship. Table 3 encapsulates these findings.

- - - Table 3 about here - - -

Collectively, media use seems to be only minimally connected to perceptions of credibility for newspapers and television news but not online news.

RQ2: Which type of news medium will respondents rate most credible?

This research question attempts to identify the statistical significance of all three credibility indices simultaneously. A repeated measures ANOVA was executed to estimate the differences between means.[12] The results are reported below in Table 4.

- - - Table 4 about here - - -

The repeated measures ANOVA supplies evidence that the means are significantly different. To pinpoint exactly which means are different, paired group t-tests were utilized for post-hoc comparisons, a technique often recommended by other researchers (Hochberg & Tamahane, 1987). These comparisons confirm that all three means are significantly different from one another. Specifically, the t-values are: 11.39 (df=780; p<.001) for newspaper vs. television credibility; -3.70 (df=466; p<.001) for television vs. online news credibility; and 4.23 (df=467; p<.001) for newspaper vs. online news credibility.

Thus, it seems that respondents thought newspapers were most credible (avg.=2.16), followed by Internet news (avg.=2.07), and television news (avg.=1.92) respectively. (Please note that means are slightly different from Table 1 because the ANOVA procedure only examines cases where data were available for all three indices). It should be remembered, however, that all three medium scores fall within the "moderately credible" category so the means are not radically different. Additional interpretation of the data will be advanced in the subsequent section.

Discussion

Methodological Concerns

Before discussing the results, it is imperative that we review some of the investigation's methodological caveats. Perhaps the most troubling problem is that the sample size was much smaller for online news opinions than for the other two media channels. Still, this should be expected because the Internet is a relatively new medium that has not yet penetrated the entire population. The fact that Austin has one of the highest diffusion rates for Internet access made a traditional survey possible and is therefore, invaluable since most polls conducted about the Internet are self-selected with participants normally responding online. Another limitation involves the generalizibility of the sample because Austin residents are typically more educated than the rest of the nation yet are similar to other urban areas (Census, 1995). Of course, this should not discount the results, but we should be careful in drawing any sweeping conclusions about media credibility perceptions. Replication in rural settings would be helpful to substantiate findings.

A final shortcoming that might be raised is that the online news questions inevitably were partially influenced by attitudes toward traditional news outlets because respondents looking at news in cyberspace may be visiting their favorite print newspaper or broadcast news website. One problem with this view, however, is that it assumes news websites are the only source of online news. Respondents' answers to the online news definition question showed otherwise (e.g., listservs represented 29 percent of definitions). In addition, this criticism seems to suggest that looking at online news is no different than experiencing it through traditional channels, when prior empirical work has shown this is not the case (e.g., Fredin, 1997). As a result, we did not perceive this to be a dramatic problem but do believe it should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

Interpretation

The data analyses seem to uncover many interesting relationships that need to be further discussed. First, one unforeseen outcome was that newspaper credibility ratings exceeded television news credibility ratings, in the face of the abundant empirical work that has recorded the opposite trend over past years (e.g., Lemert, 1970; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Another noteworthy finding was that Internet news was assigned more credibility than television news, especially when pondering this channel's infancy. However, some research has suggested that online material is judged more credible than information from television (Brady, 1996).

One explanation for these results may be that the introduction of online sources has changed public opinion of traditional media credibility. Regardless of whether people actually have access to or use the web, its mere presence could have reduced trust in television while concomitantly increased trust in newspapers. The large body of "diffusion" literature submits that the dissemination of new technology often shifts opinions of older media (Rogers, 1983; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971).

An alternative interpretation may be that our sample deviated somewhat from the 1990 Census in terms of education, thereby accounting for these differences. The University of Texas at Austin, for instance, is now the largest university in the United States, and the booming high-tech industry in the surrounding area constantly attracts employees with higher educational levels. Thus, one could argue that this more educated sample would read more newspapers and use the Internet with greater frequency, which would justify the incongruity in credibility scores.

A final interpretation could be that the differences were not that staggering simply because all three channels were judged "moderately credible." This corroborates the findings of Johnson & Kaye (1998), who discovered differences in news credibility across channels but a general skepticism of media (print & online for their study) across the board. Hence, though it is vital that we acknowledge there are multiple viewpoints pertaining to news credibility, we must also be aware that people seem to be somewhat apprehensive about all three media outlets.

In summary, one could infer that survey respondents appear to moderately believe news that originates from all three media but do tend to give higher credence to newspaper stories before Internet news and Internet news before television news.

The definition of online news seems to be a pervasive topic for audiences. Although the data show some agreement, consensus is far from being reached. Nonetheless, the definition breakdowns do demonstrate that the majority of people agreed on the meaning of the topic—they think it refers to news websites.

Another substantial observation involved the detected correlation among perceptions of all three channels. This finding not only replicated the results of previous scholars (e.g., Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Newhagen & Nass, 1989), who noticed a relationship between newspaper and television credibility, but extends this observation to the domain of Internet news credibility as well. Survey participants seem to perceive all three media in the same direction, indicating that people probably have an overall perception of news credibility that only slightly fluctuates across media. This verifies the t-test and ANOVA analyses that reported differences but exposed generally moderate perceptions of credibility for television, newspaper, and online news. Therefore, perceptions of news credibility are fairly uniform, but some distinctions are made among media outlets.

The lack of support for the relationship between interpersonal communication and news credibility was not anticipated but might be explained by the social atmosphere or lack thereof that is present when people interact with these different media channels. For example, watching television is often thought of as a group experience where audiences integrate the information they secure from the medium into their daily conversations with others (e.g., Lull, 1990; McQuail et al., 1972). As a result, the increased amount of interpersonal communication undermines the credibility of the media channel, as proposed earlier by Chaffee (1982). In contrast, reading newspapers and going online are activities people ordinarily engage in alone, which diminishes the degree to which they promote interpersonal discussion. Accordingly, the individualistic media channels (newspapers and the Internet) found no linkage between news credibility and interpersonal communication. Of course, future work should explore whether such speculation is warranted.

Generally, it appears that media use is marginally connected with perceptions of credibility. Measures of local television viewership were modestly associated with television credibility. Similarly, perceptions of newspaper credibility were modestly linked to newspaper readership behavior. On the other hand, correlations between credibility perceptions for network news and web use were not. In short, these data confirm the findings of Rimmer & Weaver (1987) because our "frequency" media use questions were not strongly allied to evaluations of news credibility. Nevertheless, respondents appeared to hold stronger credibility opinions about local news outlets than other types of media channels, an area that commands more attention in future scholarship.

Implications

Ultimately, it appears that further investigation of media credibility is demanded given the rapid growth of online news. The convergence of media is not only shaping media content but also seems to be linked to people's perceptions of media as well. The heightened position of newspapers in credibility ratings is encouraging for the newspaper industry, which has been waning in public opinion polls for many years. However, the overall mediocre ratings of media credibility should be disconcerting for professional journalists and mass communication researchers alike. More scrutiny of this pattern is necessary to determine if this observation was merely idiosyncratic to this survey, or has the rise of online media truly modified public perceptions of press credibility generally.

Notwithstanding the limited linkage with interpersonal communication, future news credibility research should explore the consequences of interpersonal discussion to shed light on the discrepant findings found in this study across media channels. Such work might expand the concept of "media use" to a more generic term such as "communication use," thereby providing hybrid measures of media and interpersonal communication habits.

Another implication is that further analyses are required to pin down definitions of online news. Will a universal definition be engendered or will conceptions continue to remain elusive? Such explorations can help us determine what criteria people apply to form opinions about Internet news credibility, patterned after the work of Newhagen & Nass (1989) on television news.

The similarity of credibility perceptions for television, newspaper, and online news suggests that people may orient themselves to media content that is analogous across media channels, triggering parallel opinions of credibility. Perhaps more strategies should be developed to elevate press credibility as a whole rather than creating specialized recommendations for television, newspaper, and online news separately. A panel study comparing participant news exposure patterns, in terms of content, to their opinions of news credibility might help cultivate such knowledge. Further research might also explore whether the uniformity in credibility perceptions applies to sub-genres of news such as magazines and prime-time television news programs (e.g., Dateline).

For instance, would differences be discerned if respondents were asked to give their opinions on local vs. network television news?

In summary, the proliferation of new technologies has provided a fruitful forum for future academic work on media credibility. The similarities and deviations that arose from this study, in comparison to prior investigations, reflect the need for a resurgence of news credibility analyses. It is hoped that the present study can act as springboard for future intellectual discourse in this area of mass communication.

Notes

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, the terms media channel and medium will be used interchangeably.

[2] Some examples of the Berlo et al. semantic differential scales included asking whether a source was "just--unjust" (Safety Factor), "experienced--inexperienced" (Qualifications Factor), and "confident--not confident' (Dynamism Factor).

[3] Whitehead's Competence Factor is similar to Berlo's Qualifications Factor and the Objectivity Factor rates how "objective--subjective" a source is.

[4] In this examination, frequency questions were used allowing us to replicate Rimmer & Weaver's (1987) observations. Ideally, we would have also liked to incorporate preference and reliance questions as Wanta & Hu (1994) did, but space was limited and frequency questions had applications for other researchers involved in the survey. As a result, they were selected.

[5] The formula for efficiency of reaching households is possible households / all numbers.

[6] The formula for the completion rate of the sample is completions / eligible numbers.

[7] As alluded to earlier, statistical tests revealed that eliminating certain questions would not improve the reliability of the scale.

[8] As suggested above, local and national network news viewing were separated because other researchers have argued that opinions about television news credibility are most influenced by local news broadcasts (e.g., Newhagen & Nass, 1989).

[9] Regardless, this question was somewhat problematic because it deals with general use of the internet and does not focus on using the internet specifically for news. However, a similar criticism could be made of typical newspaper use questions since people surely read newspapers for purposes other than acquiring news, including advertising, coupons, entertainment, etc. yet are deemed appropriate for media credibility analyses. Likewise, we feel a general measure of Internet use can serve as a proxy for estimating online news use and was therefore justified in this study.

[10] We will consider this point further in the Discussion section.

[11] The total exceeds 100 percent due to rounding.

[12] A Credibility Factor with 3 levels was created with each index acting as a level.

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Figures & Tables

Figure 1

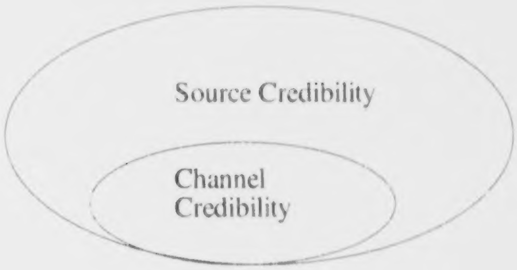

TABLE 1: Credibility Scores

Variable	Means	Std. Deviation	Possible Range	N
TV News Credibility Index	1.94	.64	0-4	796
Web News Credibility Index	2.08	.62	0-4	473*
Newspaper Credibility Index	2.17	.62	0-4	792

* Smaller N due to large number of respondents who answered "don't know" to questions about online news credibility. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived credibility.

TABLE 2: Credibility Scores by Media Channels

	Low Cred.	Moderate Cred.	High Cred.	Chi-Square	N
Newspaper	65	588	136	612***	789
	(8%)	(75%)	(17%)		(100%)
TV	116	588	88	598***	792
	(15%)	(74%)	(11%)		(100%)
Web	54	353	64	367***	471
	(12%)	(75%)	(14%)		(101%)*

* Value exceeds 100 percent due to rounding

*** p<.001

Note: The credibility categories were broken down as follows: 0-1.33=low credibility, 1.34-2.66=moderate credibility, and 2.67-4=high credibility. These categories were determined by simply dividing the four point range in credibility scores into three equal intervals (4/3=1.33 range per category).

Table 3: Correlations between Media Use and Perceptions of News Credibility

	Newspaper Cred.	*TV Cred.*	*Web Cred.*
Watch Local News	r=.04; n=789	r=.07*; n=793	r=-.01; n=471

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Watch Network News	r=.01; n=788	r=-.01; n=792	r=.03; n=472
Read Newspapers	r=.09*; n=791	r=0; n=795	r=.04; n=472
Use Web	r=.02; n=562	r=-.02; n=565	r=.09; n=401

* p<.05

Table 4: Repeated Measures ANOVA for Mean News Credibility Scores

Source of Variation	SS	DF	MS	F	Sig. of F
Within + Residual	179.83	922	.20		
Credibility	13.71	2	6.85	35.14	p<.001

Note: Tests for Within-Subject Effects.

Appendix A
(Sample & Census Demographic Breakdowns)

Age	**Austin Sample (percents)**	**1990 Census (percents)**
18-24	23*	21
25-29	15*	15
30-34	14*	14
35-39	12*	12
40-44	10*	9
45-49	9*	6
50-54	5*	5
55-59	3*	4
60-64	3*	4
65+	6	10
Race/Ethnic Group		
Caucasian/white	74	68
African-American/black	7*	10
Hispanic/Latino	12	19
Asian or Pacific Islander	4	.03
Native American	1*	.003
Other	2	N/A
Gender		
Male	48*	50
Female	52*	50
Income		
Under $10k	9	15
$10-$19k	11	18
$20-$29K	17*	16
$30-$39k	14*	13
$40-$49k	13	9
$50-$59k	9*	6
$60-$74k	10*	12
$75-$99k	9	5
$100k+	8	4
Education		
Some high school	3	16
High school graduate	15	20
Some college/technical school	37*	34
College graduate	28	20
Some graduate school/graduate	7	10

* Sample statistic falls within confidence interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence interval.

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THE LOGIC OF THE LINK: THE ASSOCIATIVE PARADIGM IN COMMUNICATION CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

The metaphor of hypertext or "link" shapes the way we think about and process contemporary informational forms, overtaking the Traditionalist paradigm for constructing and critically analyzing texts. This essay examines the features of the newly-emerging Associative paradigm accompanying hypertext vis-à-vis the Traditionalist paradigm underlying print documents. The implications to communication criticism (practice and pedagogy)—and thus to culture and society—are considered.

THE LOGIC OF THE LINK: THE ASSOCIATIVE PARADIGM IN COMMUNICATION CRITICISM

A recent experience with one of my public address classes has taught me something about communication education. One day I asked the class to locate the transcripts of the speeches they would be analyzing. At the next class period, one dutiful student informed me that transcripts of the speeches he wanted to study did not exist. He complained that he had spent three hours on the World Wide Web and had found nothing

Upon reflection, I mark this student's complaint as a milestone. Like watching the Berlin wall being sledge-hammered flat, I knew that life would never be the same. I realized in a flash that my student was like many students today who, when given a research assignment, vault almost involuntarily to the Web, bypassing print documents as a source of information. In witnessing this rush to the Internet, I began to contemplate its implications: the psychosocial effects of this new form of retrieving and processing information.

To understand this new form of information retrieval and its far-reaching implications, I note first that information is processed through mental filters. "Human beings," Johnson-Laird (1988) showed us, "understand the world by constructing working models of it in their minds" (p. 10). Writing in *Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC)* (February 1996), Chandler posits that media technologies condition those mental filters:

> Any medium facilitates, emphasizes, intensifies, amplifies, enhances or extends certain kinds of use or experience whilst inhibiting, restricting or reducing other kinds (as excerpted in *CMC* Web site).

Neil Postman (1985) sounds the horn of technological determinism, arguing that the introduction of any new technology into society changes the way that society thinks, the way it processes information. Postman joins a chorus of medium-message scholars who have understood that not merely machinery but, more broadly, modalities of communication endow messages with their power, largely determining the influence those messages exert on society and powering paradigmatic shifts (Berge, 1995, p. 6). Thus, my students' rush to the Web suggests something about those shifts underway. Yet, as I hope to show in this essay, the "logic of print" is not dead even as a new "logic of the link" assumes a lead role in today's construction and critical analysis of rhetorical texts.

The World Wide Web, as a dominant modality of information retrieval among communication undergraduates, induces students to view message construction in a distinct manner. I believe that this distinct manner of constructing (and reconstructing) messages clashes with traditional models for framing discourse. At work among the traditionalist paradigm and the emerging Web-based paradigm is a rhetorical rivalry, whose disputants set forth their own lexicon and legitimating standards. I want to suggest that a problem we as communication professors face today in instilling critical-thinking skills is really a problem in competing media-generated rhetorical paradigms, and the solution to this problem begins with the recognition that the print textual paradigm that informs much of traditional pedagogy does not comport with the Web-based form many of our students bring to the classroom. Later, I sketch the possibilities of bridging the hypertext and print paradigms.

The Page-Based Text and the Traditionalist Paradigm

Many communication professors who have been teaching more than ten years learned a traditionalist rhetorical canon. They studied the Ancient rhetorical theorists and analyzed significant speeches (and some important written documents that bear the imprint of an oral heritage). In undertaking analyses of these speeches, students of rhetoric did so with three assumptions about the texts they were studying. They assumed, first, that public address is linear. The texts they studied, applying a "line of thought," were expected to consist of a succession of words and ideas proceeding from Point A to Point B to Point C. Secondly, rhetorical students assumed that the texts they were studying would be closed and complete. The field of study was whatever fell within the contours of the bounded page(s); it was a finished product, a self-contained unit lying in "canonical passivity" (Lanham 1992, p. 234). Bolter (1991) remarks that the "printed book [or page] . . . encourages the notion of a text as an organic whole—a unit of meaning that is physically separate from and therefore independent of all other texts" (p. 163). Thirdly, the text students studied would be rational. Students expected the text to proceed logically and to possess clarity, unity, and coherence (Faigley, 1992, p. 184). The prototype of the text traditionalists studied was the speech. A student could go to the library, pull it off a shelf, photocopy it (or transcribe into a notebook), carry it around in a Manila file folder, take it home, read through it in a linear way, and highlight with a yellow marker its key aspects, such as its premise, proof, and conclusion.

Craig R. Smith's (1999) analysis in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* of "The anti-war rhetoric of Daniel Webster" is a modern-day textbook holdout of the Traditionalist paradigm. Reviewing its salient features casts light on how the Traditionalist paradigm operates in rhetorical textual criticism.

Linear features are most evident in the sequential language Smith employs. In working his way through several of Webster's speeches, Smith uses phrases such as "he began by," "previewing," "at first," "soon," "followed by," "at the end," "moved to," "later in the speech," and "in the last part of the speech." Such vertical linguistic cues prompt the reader to look for a logical progression that mounts an overall argument. One paragraph will illustrate the 1-2-3 propulsion of Smith's reasoning:

> First, the United States was the proper size in terms of geography for its 20,000,000 inhabitants: tampering with its boundaries threatened the Constitution: "There must be some limit to the extent of our territory, if we would make our institutions permanent" . . . . Second, shifting to the forensic mode, Webster claimed that the "spirit of aggrandizement" would injure America's credibility abroad . . . With his credibility established and his foes condemned, Webster issued a third argument, the most clearly deliberative and the lengthiest."

Besides its decidedly linear thrust, Smith's analysis also conveys the closed textual nature of the speeches he examines. Referring to a "braid" of genre, a "triangulation" of appeals, and an "apologia" of attacks, Smith employs symbolic formulations to express the boundedness of the texts. He indicates the detached nature of texts also by establishing a sub-heading called "The Rhetorical Texts," implying an autonomy between text and audience or context.

Smith signals the rational perspective he applies by focusing primarily on argumentative types he teases out of Webster's texts. Attention to epideictic, deliberative, and forensic themes—we have called this a Traditionalist approach, have we not?—thread Smith's critical essay. He also addresses pragmatic and transcendent appeals and points to substance and evidence supporting claims. Additionally, he casts Webster's discourse as "campaigns of persuasion."

Perhaps most tellingly, Smith views Webster's discourse as purposely adversarial. The title of Smith's essay discloses already the essay's "anti-war" focus. Later, Smith observes as well anti-imperialism and notes how Webster's arguments refute the opposition's position. Thus, proceeding from top to bottom with self-contained, "closed" texts, Smith traces Webster's reasoning process, which we are to understand as rhetorical refutation.

The Web-Based Text and the Associative Paradigm

Today's dominant forms of public messages, however, do not resemble such texts as Webster's speeches and Smith's critical essay. Contemporary messages fly out at us in talk show talk, graphic icons, news soundbites, and round-the-clock headlines. Barker and Kemp (1990), in fact, write that today's students do not have much facility for deriving meaning from print documents:

> [M]odern students do not bring to their studies the kinds of training and background previously considered necessary. They come from primarily oral strata . . . . and [are] often nearly print illiterate. They respond to a democratic model of shared knowledge as opposed to older, elitist models in which knowledge was the privileged possession of certain groups (p. 3).

Whereas the speech was the typical message form in a traditionalist paradigm, the Web page is the prototype for this new generation of information processors. Advocates of the Web as medium-of-choice say that hypertext found within Web pages employs the process of association by which the mind actually organizes information, overcoming the unnatural reasoning process imposed on audiences in linear print texts (Bush 1945, Nelson 1987, and Englebart and Hooper, 1988).

The Web page guides the user's thought in distinct ways, fostering a method of processing information. First, a hypertextually-reasoned text is lateral. The Web user moves not down the page in linear fashion but "sideways" to other sites. As such, Web-imposed reasoning assembles collateral nodes of information instead of erecting linear structures, resulting in a "Cultural Salvation Army Outlet with unaccountable collections of incompatible ideas, beliefs, and sources" (Leitch, 1983, p. 59). Secondly, the document is understood to be open and incomplete. It is a work under construction, unfinished, held in suspension; the author, in fact, has deliberately chunked up material so that the Web visitor can pause at any point to pursue material related to a given point of information. Thirdly, the Web document is seen as relational. Messages contained within a Web site are understood according to how they can be linked to something else, i. e. in terms of items with which they can be related. Landow (1988), calling such links "a web of relations" (p. 11), summarizes its methodology:

> [O]ne proceeds in understanding any particular literary or other phenomena, and that one begins this process by asking about the possible existence of relations to other such phonomena, at which

> point one investigates them and tries to perceive relations among them all (p. 6).

Unlike the print document fixed in space and time, the Web document is "a world in constant motion" (Bolter, 1991, p. 155). The clicks to and from scattered sites reconstitute the texts both from which and to which the user has linked. If we accept Postman's technological determinism and my claim that hypertext is the dominant textual paradigm today, one can infer that in the new and dominant messages forms of today, an alternative logic thus operates. I call this alternative logic "the logic of the link." It is an associative logic, an architecture of reasoning comprised of intertextual pathways and networks. Navigation between nodes of information suggests that ideas are more closely related to one another than bounded texts could allow. With a click of the mouse, a document from one genre, in one period of time, on one topic can be linked to another document from another time period, from another genre, and on a different topic. In such manner, ideas do not inhabit fixed spheres; instead, their orbit is whatever course the Web user wishes to take them on. As Bolter (1991) observes, the "electronic writing space can support a network in which all elements have equal status and to be at the margin is itself only provisional" (p. 163). Disparate ideas converge in such an association of otherwise unrelated materials; ideas are "connected" more than they are ordered according to some logical scheme. Web readers learn to search out associations between ideas over the step-by-step development and logical coherence of ideas.

Ronald L. Jackson II (1999) has critically analyzed discourse typically postmodernist; his critical analysis itself bears all the features of the Web-based text undergirding postmodernist modes of discourse. Jackson's essay, "White space, white privilege: mapping discursive inquiry into the self," ironically appears in the same edition of *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* as Smith's (examined above).

Jackson stakes his non-linear critical course early in his analysis: "Our discussion of these discourses . . . is not to be read hierarchically, to do so would be to build a strata rather than an assemblage." He justifies such movement on the basis that it "allowed the raw substance of each discourse to emerge from the two groups [the white participants in his study of white racial identity]". Here Jackson attends to intertextual elements, matter that Traditionalists do not much heed.

Jackson also recognizes the bifurcations within postmodernist Self-Other conceptual models. Such models, he writes, impose an interior and an exterior dimension onto discourse. Whites attending historically-black universities might define their racial identity in terms of their perceptions of the "other" race, the race "exterior" of their own. Jackson ponders, "it would be . . . fascinating to avoid the splice, and treat the exterior and interior as a continuum, as a community that travels together through space and time—one always affected by the other". The text, then, that Jackson would examine is an "open" one, one that moves back and forth between "interior" (self-reflective) and "exterior" (definition by comparison) discursive units. Here one finds a logic that links between discursive sites. "...Other differences," writes Jackson, "may be the centerpiece from which whiteness is developed and sustained". Elsewhere in the essay he writes that, with regard to discourse on White identity construction, "there was always the option to withdraw and return to a more comfortable cultural space, in this case, one's own." Such open, shifting, tenuous texts are composed not by standards of proof but by cross-referenced perspectives. Quoting Greig Henderson (1988), Jackson states that "we necessarily define a thing in terms of something else" (p. 33).

Thus, a mismatch occurs between the traditionalist logic that has lived a long life in the discipline of rhetorical criticism and the associative one that has come of age. The differences can be seen more clearly if the features of the speech are juxtaposed with those of the Web page as seen in the chart below.

Traditionalist Paradigm The Speech	**Associative Paradigm The Web Page**
Linear	Lateral
Closed/Complete	Open/Unfinished
Rational	Relational

Thus a challenge presents itself: how to acquaint Web-conditioned message critics to page-bound, orally-rooted, rhetorical texts and to critical analysis of those texts when their primary referents for public texts are fragmentary, fluid, and electronic. In what follows, I offer a scenario for relating page-bound texts to other forms of public address dominant in today's public square . I thus adopt a constructivist approach, attempting to relate new (to traditionalist) information to information already known (by Web users) (Kaufer and Carley, p. 15). In the scenario that follows, I examine various forms of political discourse in terms of their hypertextuality.

In an introductory session, Web-savvy consumers could survey a message form most familiar to them: the Web page. Since in this illustration our field of study is political discourse, a Web-oriented reader might scrutinize political parties' homepages. The instructor would help students to identify the salient features of the web pages. Chief among those features would be the pages' links to other sites. For example, the Democratic Party homepage (1996) includes links to "Election 98," "Countdown 98," "DNC News," and "Where We Stand." The Republican Party homepage (1996) includes links to "Advocates-Environment," "Budget Articles," "The Party Line," "Republican Governors," and "Think Tanks." The Reform Party homepage (1996) has links to "Principles of Reform," "Lend Your Support," "State by State," "In the News," "Online Headquarters," "Interactive Gallery," and "Candidates 98." Meanings will shift and evolve as browsers click on now this site, now that site.

Having focused on the links in the Web pages, one can recognize hypertextuality in soundbite discourse. Such discourse follows next because it closely resembles the clickable texts within Web pages: a soundbite is a kind of index directing listeners to "link" to other references. One can see soundbites as a synopsis of more extensive remarks in the way that a phrase highlighted in blue on a Web page functions as a capsule of what the browser would find on the referent text. One could also see soundbites as affect, the emotive facet of the spoken message. One could also see soundbites as premise, as the foundation to a bigger argument which could (and the politician hopes will) be accessed. Lastly, they could see soundbites as a call to action, or a conduct cue.

In a next move toward traditional (political) public address, one could next search out a textual form somewhat more extensive in textual content: talk show talk. In the same way that Web pages contain links, politicians' remarks are intended to lead the viewer to other "sites," other units of thought about a given topic. One could think of certain allusions within interviewee's comments as links in space or links in time. For example, in an interviewee on *Larry King*

Live in 1994, President Clinton addressed a question from a caller on the matter of crime. In Clinton's answer, one could think of Clinton's response to a local (Detroit) matter as a spatial link to a larger, national issue:

> First of all, let me say that you call from *Detroit*, which has had a lot of murders . . . But this lady could have called from *many other cities* in the country and small towns, too [italics added for emphasis).

Conceptualizing Clinton's maneuver of spatial frames as "links" helps students to visualize the notion of enlarging discursive frames. Doing so also helps students to see how remarks work with other remarks to establish a speaker's point.

One could also sample links in time. Again from the *Larry King Live* talk show (1994), one can see how a politician (again, Clinton) prompts the audience to cast their attention wider than on the immediate time frame imposed in the question. Responding to a question on Somalia, Clinton set up past, present, and future referents:

> Well, I think we have done a good job in Somalia. We've saved a lot of lives there. But when we went there it was primarily for a humanitarian purpose to try to save lives. I was told when I became President that we might be able to withdraw the American troops as early as one month, 2 months into my term *[Past]* . . . What we have done is set in motion a process in which the clan can agree to a peaceable way of governing in the country among themselves *[an Ongoing Process]* . . . . So in the end, the people of

> Somalia are going to have to take responsibility and their future *[Future]*."

Using the metaphor of "links," one can begin to understand how discursive forms frame ideas a certain way. While students focus on links to time frames, they surreptitiously become aware of temporal progression within the speaker's remarks.

At this point, we have surveyed discourse ranging from most familiar to less closely canvassed. Coming to the study of political discourse from a Web generation's own "logic"—the logic of the link—electronically accustomed readers can begin to see traditional forms of political communication (e.g., the stump speech, the nomination acceptance speech) in a new light. They can see page-bound discourse, first, as linked to audiences. Here they would see speeches as targeted to segments of people, such as voting blocs. We can see political speech as linked, secondly, to public opinion: surveys, polls, public clamor. Thirdly, we can understand speeches as linked to political constraints. In this regard, we would become familiar with legal constraints as to what, for example, the president is authorized to say or do or what laws on perjury protect or proscribe. Fourth, we can view speeches as linked to other texts. An instructor could teach students, for example, to view Clinton's second inaugural address in terms of the whole rhetorical genre of presidential inaugurals. Or one could learn to view Susan Molinari's Republican Keynote address against Ann Richards' or Barbara Jordans' Democratic Keynote addresses.

By learning something about the way students conceptualize public messages, we are newly enabled to guide our students in the enduring enterprise of interpretive analysis. Rational, cohesive, linear messages acquire new relevance when repackaged along with other contemporary discursive forms as the intersection of matrices, the juncture of multiple and divergent other texts.

Observations

The effects of such repackaging are profound. Viewing print documents as translatable to electronic documents subjects those Traditionally-grounded documents to the epistemology of Web-based thought. Below, I contemplate the paradigm shifts promoted in the adaptation to an associative logic, a logic of the link. Chiefly one finds a unification of rhetorical spheres.

A significant implication is that Web-based reasoning promotes a communitarian ethic. Hypertextuality entails co-authorship. Readers/users share textual authorship with the textual creator as they (readers/users) negotiate the pathways they choose to navigate; the reader "co-authors" on the basis of these navigational choices. Besides authorial community, hypertext places *texts* in community as it assembles a network of possible cross references into a shared space. Electronically-based texts share semiotic ground; intertextuality is a distinguishing feature of hypertext. Johnson-Eilola (1993) finds two benefits of these cross-referencing capabilities:

> First, it connects individuals with social contexts in ways that can help us recognize tendential forces in society and work to change them in productive ways. . . . On the second front, our own pedagogies have increasingly valued *connection* in theory but not in practice (p. 25).

Print-based documents, in contrast, are solipsistic. The writer of the print documents unconsciously holds that "no one can interrupt my solitude" (Ong, 1982, p. 101) though footnotes, allusions, and references can play a subordinate role in Traditionalist texts.

Similarly, associative logic dissolves disjunctions; it is, again, connective. The logic of the link searches out connections between text and text in its intertextuality. Web pages place the original text spatially proximate to other electronically-posted texts, fostering a kinship among units of thoughts and hence among the people who formulated those thoughts. Further still, nodes of information encode each other in hypertextual linking. By contrast, print-based documents, in their fixity hold texts (including con-texts) spatially distant.

Another observation is that a rhetoric constituted associatively is invitational. It bids readers to pursue alternative—*alternating* if they wish—fields of thought, which it would assemble like birds of passage into shifting, migratory meaning, unlike print documents which hold readers to the confines of a printed text. The logic of the link is predicated on a feminist notion that the reader/listener/viewer perspective figures prominently in rhetorical propositions and is invited in the authorship of those propositions (Ulmer 1994, p. 36). As such, it overcomes the constraints of print texts, rooted in an oral heritage, which tend to maximize oppositions and speak "in the face of at least implied adversaries" (Ong, 1982, 110).

Lastly, *space (chora)* replaces place *(topos* or *locus)* as the locative heuristic of associative thinking. *Chora* is a musical term connoting simultaneous utterances or chorus (Ulmer 1994). As the alternative method of invention in associative thinking, it tends toward the harmonization of units of thought. One accustomed to processing information the way hypertext prompts him/her to do so learns to spot not evidences and markings of an argument but—to link from a vocal to a spatial metaphor—textual "town commons" or intersections. The text, then, resembles a "tract of land—a building together with its grounds and other appurtenances" (p. 47).

The associative paradigm, thus, becomes the irrepressible paradigm. Like North Carolina kudzu, it overtakes any text it encounters, even linear ones, unifying them under its vines—at least until the next technological transformation.

Endnotes

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"When Bad Things Happen To Bad People: Will social comparison theory explain effects of viewing TV talk shows?"

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ABSTRACT

Why are millions of people attracted to, what some term, “trash TV” talk shows? Self-enhancement, or feeling better about oneself and one’s life, may be one of the primary reasons people watch what some consider to be “trashy” television talk programs. An experimental factorial design was used to evaluate predictions made from social comparison theory. Data obtained suggest that high self-esteem people felt better and experienced greater benefits after exposure to inferior, incompetent guests. Theoretical and societal implications of these results are discussed, as are the future directions for research in social comparison theory and media consumption.

"When Bad Things Happen To Bad People:" Will social comparison theory explain effects of viewing TV talk shows?

Felecia and Erica are best friends, or were best friends until Erica slept with Felecia's boyfriend, Greg. Felecia found this out while having dinner with Erica's sister, Candace. Now, Erica is pregnant, but is afraid to tell anyone because she's not exactly sure who the father is. So, Felecia, Candace, Greg, Erica, and Erica's boyfriend, Patrick, decide to air their dirty laundry on a national television talk show instead of with a counselor or psychologist. According to Abt and Mustazza (1997), the "purpose of the confessants' disclosures is entertainment, not therapy, and that entertainment has been known to go to bizarre lengths" (p. 98). And millions of people listen in. Why do viewers faithfully watch television talk shows that seem to focus on other people's disclosures and personal problems?

Mass communication researchers long have been concerned with the factors that influence media use. When people are asked why they spend so much time with the mass media, particularly television, many respond that they do so in order to be informed and/or entertained (Rubin, 1981). Some individuals claim to watch television for information, while others claim that television is a means to help pass time or escape from personal problems. The present research is based on the assumption that television may play a more complex and subtler role.

Purpose of the Research

Recent Nielsen ratings show that "*Jerry Springer*" is now the number one rated TV talk show, knocking the *Oprah Winfrey* Show out of the number one spot it had enjoyed for more than a decade (Nielsen Media Research, 1998; The Official ®TVTalkShows.com® Web Site, 1999). The Springer show has recently received attacks and criticisms namely for the content (e.g., exposés of spouses who reveal lesbian or gay desires) and behaviors exhibited by many of the guests (e.g., fights and other aggressive acts). Criticisms for "trash talk" help to formulate two major research questions: (1) Why does "The Springer Show" average and enjoy such popularity and high viewer ratings (e.g., a 7.4 rating) while "The Oprah Show," a show that recently has changed its content to be more "uplifting and positive," continues to lose viewers and is slipping in its audience ratings (e. g., from a 10.0 rating to a 7.0 rating)? And; (2) Who benefits more from exposure to entertaining programs like *Springer*? And what are the benefits of exposure to such programming?

Viewers who regularly watch this type of programming may perceive absurd and abnormal content (e.g., real-life cop dramas, TV talk shows, etc) to be more "exciting" and "entertaining." Viewers may engage in a forced or automatic comparison with certain media images and the result of such a forced comparison is a short-term enhancement of affect, namely feelings specifically related to self-perception and esteem. It is possible that viewers of TV talk shows watch absurd television content with an unsuspecting desire to "feel better" about their own lives and personal circumstances.

Contribution to Theory Development and Field of Mass Communication

What impact do television talk shows have on viewers, particularly viewers between the ages of 18-34 (the target audience)? Television talk shows are dominating the airwaves of daytime television and have become, according to Abt and Mustazza (1997), "America's entertainment." Viewers, research suggests, have become fascinated with and dedicated to viewing their favorite television talk show (Nielsen Media Research, 1997).

Despite the number of criticisms and concerns voiced by television talk show critics, very little research has explored how viewing these programs affect viewer mood and self-esteem and self-concept. Nor has research explored whether watching talk shows and other violent and/or sexually explicit media content encourages or specifically motivates viewers to compare the media images and circumstances with their own personal situations or circumstances. Remarkably, very little academic attention has been devoted to the messages contained in talk show programming or the effects of the messages on viewers' self-concepts, perceptions of reality, attitudes, and opinions.

The present study analyzes and specifically sets out to identify unspoken gratifications and effects offered by particular media. People may be unwilling or unaware of desires to make comparisons, particularly comparisons with media images. Social comparison theory will be used in the present research on affective consequences of viewing TV talk shows as this theory can make predictions, explain, and reveal a viewing motive that people may be unable or reluctant to express openly. The present study aims to investigate an often ignored media effect of: viewers may select and expose themselves to particular watch media (e.g., television talk shows) because these programs may help them to feel better about their own lives and life circumstances. Using social comparison as a theoretical foundation, the study examines the notion that sleazy and abnormal programming may be entertaining and popular because it serves as a tool that people with different kinds of personal problems use to cope with personal problems.

The focus of the study, therefore, is on examining a specific audience, the television talk show audience, and discovering whether this type of media content provides a means for individuals to engage in social comparisons, which consequently enables viewers to feel more satisfied with life situations and personal circumstances. The present study reports experimental evidence intending to bring together media communication and social psychology. By fusing social comparison theory with the uses and gratifications paradigm, the study builds theory and offers research findings in the area of uses, gratifications, and effects of viewing certain media content.

Review of the Literature

Research on the TV Talk Show's Impact on the Viewer

It has been speculated that television talk shows attract viewers because they grab people emotionally by employing topics or social issues that encourage anger and other intense emotions (Keller, 1993). This emotional effect may explain why many popular television shows continue to broadcast stories of violent crimes, adultery, incest, racism, sexuality, and complex problems in interpersonal relationships with family members, friends, or co-workers. For example, according to Keller (1993), the main objective of many TV talk shows is to elicit a viewer's emotional response. A recent quote taken from a TV talk show producer clearly illustrates and supports this idea: "When you're booking guests, you're thinking, 'How much confrontation can this person provide me?' The more confrontation the better. You want people just this side of a fistfight" (Gamson, 1995, p. 68).

Millions of people each day watch television talk shows. Research results reveal that the faithful viewers of television talk shows tend to be men and women between the ages of 18 and 34 (Simmons Market Research Bureau, 1991). This young target audience constitutes approximately 6% of the total national daytime viewing audience. This means that more than 600,000 young adults are regular viewers of talk shows.

Using a Theoretical Framework to Explain Consumption of TV Talk Shows

If you ask the typical television talk show viewer "Why do you watch talk shows?" he or she may respond by saying "for information" or "because they help me to find out what is going on in the world" (Frisby & Weigold, 1994). However, talk shows and other similar types of media content may serve more covert, unexpressed functions. For example, viewers may be attracted to talk shows because the guests and the topics being discussed may make them feel better about themselves and their life circumstances. Such a function is predicted by social comparison theory.

Social Comparison Theory.

Exposure to tragic events and/or bad news almost invites social comparison among viewers (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986). Viewers may be encouraged to compare and contrast their own situation with the situations of the "suffering parties they witness, and ... this contrasting eventually produces a form of satisfaction" (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986, p. 317). Affect is enhanced because viewers, seeing the misfortune of others, become appreciative of their life circumstances and situations. The present study explores the notion that talk shows may be popular with audiences because of the affective consequences that follow from audience social comparisons.

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), as applied to cognitive processing and effects of exposure to certain media content, posits that people will compare themselves and others to people and images that they perceive to be similar and/or represent realistic goals. Social comparison theory also posits that individuals are motivated by a drive or need to compare their abilities and opinions (Wheeler, 1991; Wheeler & Reis, 1991; Wood, 1989). Furthermore, the theory suggests that people make automatic, habitual, unwilling comparisons as a result of exposure to images without recognizing or being aware that they are indeed making comparisons with the images. Thus, it is possible that viewers of TV talk shows are vulnerable to forced comparisons with the guests on the programs and are unaware of the comparisons they make (Goethals, 1986).

In real-life, everyday situations, it would be extremely difficult to avoid making some type of social comparison (Goethals, 1986). Frequently, people may compare themselves with others in their immediate environment and in the mass media in order to judge their own personal worth. According to Goethals (1986), people may make comparisons with salient or available others, whether they want to or not. Through a social comparison with guests of the TV talk show, for example, viewers may: a) gain a sense of who they are, b) reinforce social or personal values, c) experience greater life satisfaction, and/or d) discover and understand how others deal with similar personal problems.

Downward Social Comparison

People compare themselves with others for a variety of reasons: to determine relative standing on an issue or related ability, to emulate behaviors, to determine norms, to lift spirits or feel better about life and personal situations, and to evaluate emotions, personality, and self-worth (Suls & Wills, 1991; Taylor & Loebel, 1989). More recently, social comparisons have been described as serving two additional motives besides self-evaluation: self-enhancement, and self-improvement (Wood, 1989). The present paper tests the idea that viewers compare themselves with TV talk show guests to feel better about personal circumstances and to enhance self-esteem.

People harbor unrealistically positive views of themselves, and these positive illusions often result in comparisons that make people feel better about themselves or their circumstances (Regan, Snyder, & Kassin, 1995; Wood & Taylor, 1991). *Self-enhancement* occurs as a result of downward comparisons--comparisons with similar others who are inferior or less fortunate--especially when the dimension is relevant to the self (Wills, 1981). The basic principle of downward comparison is that people feel better about their own situation and can enhance their subjective sense of well-being when they make comparisons with others who are worse off or less fortunate.

Measuring Downward Social Comparisons

A commonly accepted indicator of a downward social comparison is a change in subjective well being (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989; Wills, 1981). Subjective well being is considered to be an attitude with three basic components: cognition or one's assessments or evaluations of an object (e.g., life-as-a-whole, self-esteem, self-perceptions, mood, etc), positive affect, and negative affect (Emmons & Diener, 1985). Subjective well being can be assessed in a variety of ways. According to Gibbons and Gerrard (1991), there are four types of effects that can occur, all of which contribute to an improvement in subjective well being. The effects are:

1. An improvement in mood state
2. A boost in self-esteem
3. An increase in optimism
4. A boost in life satisfaction or coping skills and perceptions of one's own prognosis.

For the purposes of this paper, subjective well being will be measured by assessing one's life satisfaction.

Individual Differences in the Downward Social Comparison Process

Low self-esteem.

The basic principle in downward social comparison as originally proposed by Wills (1981) is that a general improvement in mood, subjective well being, and optimism will be demonstrated by low self-esteem individuals. One explanation for this may be that low self-esteem people are generally more insecure and uncertain about their abilities (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1991). Based on the literature review, it may be concluded that downward comparisons, particularly for low self-esteem individuals, provide information that says, "even if I can not change the situation, it looks like things can't get any worse." For individuals low in self-esteem, it appears as if a downward comparison communicates optimism about the future, provides encouragement and hope about the future, and proclaims that coping and getting through difficult situations is possible.

However, the converse may also hold true: it is possible that, when placed in upward comparison conditions, low self-esteem individuals might react negatively to the information provided by upward targets (e. g., "she/he is coping much better than I am"), and may report lower life satisfaction scores across time as a result of exposure to a "better off" other. In other words, exposure to upward targets situations and targets, it is believed, may inform people low in self-esteem that they are: (a) not coping well, (b) not good copers, and are not like typical students, and/or (c) coping worse than they thought.

High Self-Esteem.

What happens when people who are high in self-esteem are confronted with downward and upward targets? Based on data collected by Gibbons and Gerrard (1989), high self-esteem subjects, when placed under conditions of downward comparison, demonstrate considerably fewer changes in satisfaction with life than subjects low in self-esteem. According to Gibbons and Gerrard (1989), recognizing that there are worse off others does not improve subjective well being of high self-esteem individuals. What factor(s) might be used to enhance subjective well being for high self-esteem people?

Research suggests that most individuals high in self-esteem tend to be most affected by evidence of a target's coping success. In other words, high self-esteem people respond favorably to evidence of coping success and therefore show increases in life satisfaction only under conditions of confrontations with upward targets and comparison opportunities (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989).

Research on Self-Esteem and Social Comparison

In a study of eating disorders among college students, Gibbons and Gerrard (1989) found that low self-esteem people engage in downward comparisons more than high self-esteem people do. More importantly, data suggested that low self-esteem individuals reported significant improvement in their mood states, level of optimism, and life satisfaction. The amount of their improvement was significantly greater than that of the high self-esteem individuals, which suggests that people look for and seek out a type of "support group" so to speak or others with similar problems.

Brown et al., (1988) conducted two studies to explore the effects of self-esteem on responses to downward social comparison. The researchers hypothesized that both high and low self-esteem people engage in downward comparison, but the difference is that high self-esteem individuals engage in more direct forms of self-enhancement (i.e., derogating the target) while low self-esteem individuals will engage in more indirect forms of self-enhancement (i.e., feeling better about their self-perceptions). Sixty-two subjects were asked to estimate the number of objects or dots they saw on a dot-estimation task performance, a task that demonstrated that different people tend to consistently overestimate or underestimate the correct number of dots.

Results obtained from both studies provide support for the notion that all individuals strive to enhance their feelings of self-worth, but different people self-enhance in different ways. High self-esteem individuals do and will engage in self-enhancement, as the research tends to suggest, but for these individuals, self-enhancement was achieved by confirming positive self-views with positive feedback or group favoritism. Low self-esteem individuals, conversely, sought self-enhancement by confirming negative self-views with others who they perceived to be similar.

Previous research suggests that low self-esteem subjects exhibit more positive mood change and greater life satisfaction if they subsequently engage in a downward comparison as opposed to upward or self-evaluation comparisons (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989). High self-esteem subjects on the other hand, fail to exhibit increases in life satisfaction if and when they engage in downward comparisons. One explanation for this, according to Major, Testa, and Bylsma (1991), could be that high self-esteem subjects have higher perceived control on more optimistic outlooks and are more likely than the lower self-esteem subjects to perceive that they could become members of the same group.

Therefore based on research on social comparison theory, the following prediction should be supported:

H1: Forced automatic comparisons with inferior or incompetent talk show guests will result in an increase of life satisfaction for individuals low in self-esteem.

H2: Type of target will significant interact with self-esteem because those who are low in self-esteem may be more vulnerable to downward targets while those who are high in self-esteem may be more vulnerable to upward targets.

Conceptualization and Operationalization of the Variables under Investigation

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to people's positive and negative evaluations of themselves (Robinson, Shaver, Phillip, & Wrightsman, 1991). Self-Esteem is typically measured by summing evaluations of one's self-worth or value. It is an affective evaluation that focuses on approval and importance. Self-Esteem for the purposes of this paper will focus on the individual's evaluation and attitude about his or her self-worth and importance.

Literature on self-esteem typically describes high self-esteem people as people who feel good about themselves, are generally happy, healthy, and can adapt to very stressful situations (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). On the other hand, people who feel poorly about themselves, tend to be and are relatively anxious, pessimistic about the future, and are prone to failure, have low self-esteem. Because they expect to fail, low self-esteem individuals feel anxious and will exert little effort when they are confronted with problems or challenges.

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction, for the purposes of this paper, has been defined as a concept that: a) includes feelings of stress; b) satisfaction and/or enjoyment with relationships, in role performance or self-presentations, and c) the extent to which people perceive life's problems can be controlled by other people or controlled by chance (Kammann & Flett, 1983).

Time: Pre and Post Social Comparison Opportunity

Posttesting was conducted on measures of mood and life satisfaction. Changes in mood and life satisfaction scores from the pretest to the posttest were used to measure the effects of exposure to particular comparison targets on an individual's attitude and affective state. Analyses of mood change scores indicated whether or not self-esteem interacted with the type of comparison and feedback. This analysis was also used to determine if the results of the study were consistent with the hypotheses and predictions made by downward social comparison theory. The pre and posttest analyses determined how downward and upward comparison opportunities portrayed in the media affected particular participants.

Comparison Condition

Social comparisons made with others who are superior to or better off than oneself are referred to as *upward comparisons.* Upward comparisons, research suggests, are invoked when individuals are motivated to change or overcome problems (Major, Testa, Bylsma, 1991). Self-improvement is the main effect of an upward comparison because the targets serve as role models and teach and motivate individuals to achieve or overcome similar problems (Seta, 1982; Wood, 1989). Effective upward comparison targets are extremely competent and proficient and skillful in terms of coping with personal problems (Major et al., 1991; Seta, 1982).

On the other hand, when a social comparison involves a target who is inferior, incompetent and/or less fortunate, the comparison is referred to as a *downward comparison* (Wills, 1981). The basic principle of downward comparison is that people feel better about their own situation and enhance their subjective well-being when they make comparisons with others who are worse off or less fortunate. According to theory, downward comparisons help individuals cope with personal problems by allowing them to see themselves and their problems in a better, more positive light (Wood 1989). Downward comparisons are most likely to occur when people engage in a social comparison with a target who is incompetent and less fortunate (Sherman, Presson, & Chassin, 1984; Schulz & Decker, 1985).

Time

Effects of the comparison condition will be assessed before comparison (Time 1) and immediately after the comparison opportunity (Time2). Using this research technique, the present research will would provide participants with the media image and measure effects of exposure to the image on life satisfaction. This approach to research, according to Wood (1996), might address such questions as: "what are the [visible, quantitative] effects of comparisons with others that perform better or worse than oneself?"

Research Hypotheses and Predictions

This study will demonstrate that the effects of a forced or automatic social comparisons elicited by television content is an enhancement of life satisfaction. The present study examines the notion that television talk shows may be popular with certain audiences because, it is assumed, these programs help viewers self-enhance or feel better about themselves and their life circumstances. It is therefore hypothesized that affect is regulated and stress-related emotions are released via downward comparisons with TV images, namely TV talk show guests.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 illustrates the main study's main prediction: generally, a three-way interaction among self-esteem, comparison groups, and life satisfaction changes is expected and hypothesized. When exposed to the downward comparison condition, changes in life satisfaction should, according to research, be greater at Time 2 for low self-esteem people than for high self-esteem individuals. And, in contrast, it is expected that changes in life satisfaction at Time 2 will be more evident for high self-esteem people in the upward comparison condition than for low self-esteem individuals. Thus, it is expected that high self-esteem people will show more positive changes in life satisfaction only after making comparisons with upward targets, and that low self-esteem people will show more positive changes in life satisfaction after exposure to downward targets.

METHOD

Design and Experimental Manipulations

An experimental 2 (comparison: upward vs. downward) x 2 (self-esteem: high vs. low) x 2 (time: pre-social comparison opportunity vs. post-social comparison opportunity) mixed factorial design was used to test the experimental predictions, answer research questions, and evaluate predictions made by social comparison theory. Participants also made attributions concerning college life and the extent to which television shows accurately depict problems related to the "typical college student."

Brief Overview of the Experimental Procedures

Individuals were asked to participate in a study purportedly concerned with portrayals of college life on popular television talk show programs. Subjects then viewed a segment of a recent television talk show and received information suggesting that a talk show guest (a) is successfully dealing with relationship problems (i.e., upward comparison condition) or (b) is not dealing well with relationship problems (i.e., downward comparison). Effects of the comparisons on life satisfaction was also assessed.

The two comparison conditions, upward and downward, were created through ten-minute videotape vignettes taken from two popular television talk shows. The focus of both shows was on a discussion of a problem in the relationship problem between two guests.

Population and Sample

The sample was drawn from selected undergraduate students enrolled in three introductory undergraduate courses at a large southeastern university. All individuals received course credit in exchange for their participation and were not aware of the primary purpose of the study until the experiment ended.

While the appropriateness of using students in research produces considerable concern, it should be noted that students are also real people. "Research with college students as subjects is just as valid as research drawing on any other subject population. A behavioral phenomenon reliably exhibited is a genuine phenomenon, no matter what population is sampled in the research in which it is demonstrated" (Oakes, 1972, p. 961). Watching television talk shows is a behavioral phenomenon in which a diverse group of people engages in. And, in addition, a convenience sample such as the one employed in this study helps to provide possible explanations or hypotheses of a phenomenon (Ferber, 1977).

Questionnaires were administered to approximately 410 individuals during a mass pretesting session. Measures included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a 10-item measure that was used to assess media use information such as how often people watch television talk shows. Two hundred and thirty-two TV talk show viewers were selected on the basis of their self-esteem score and talk show viewing frequency. Participants were run in-groups of approximately 12 to 15 people each.

Materials

Self-Esteem

Rosenberg's Self-Esteem scale was used to measure self-esteem. Items on this scale asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, or 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree), with statements such as, " I feel that I have a number of good qualities," "I take a positive attitude toward myself," and "I certainly feel useless at times." The scale was selected for three reasons: (a) ease of administration and scoring, (b) brevity, and (c) it is relatively straightforward in terms of the positive or negative feelings individuals may have concerning their self-worth and value.

Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem scale is a widely used scale. The scale, which also was used in the Morse and Gergen (1970) "Mr. Clean, Mr. Dirty" study, contains 10 items that have been reported to have high face validity, high internal consistency, and high test-retest reliability and could be expected to produce an adequate estimation of an individual's level of self-esteem (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991).

Life Satisfaction

The Affectometer by Kamman and Flett (1983) measures changes in subjective well-being, namely life satisfaction. The Affectometer is a measure of the individual's general happiness containing items to assess the overall positive and negative feelings toward various life situations. It is a 40-item scale with items such as, "My life is right on track," "My future looks good," "I like myself," and "I feel like a failure" (1 = not at all, 2 = occasionally, 3 = some of the time, 4 = often, 5 = all of the time). High scores on the overall Affectometer measurement scale were used to indicate extreme happiness and satisfaction (200), while low scores indicated low happiness and low life satisfaction (40).

Procedure

Ten days prior to participation in the study, respondents completed a questionnaire in a mass pre testing session. The pretest included The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and 10 items to assess demographic information as well as television program viewing preference and frequency.

Each participant received an informed consent form, detailing general instructions of the study along with a fictional purpose of the study. Subsequently, in an effort to facilitate honest responding during the experiment, respondents were asked to use a four-digit phone number as their code number for the experiment. Participants were assured of their confidentiality and were instructed not to place their names on any of the questionnaires.

After the mass testing session, the experimenter gathered the informed consent forms and entered all data into SPSS. The investigator then selected the participants who indicated that they watch television talk shows occasionally or always (i.e., 3 or more times a week), and were female. Participants then were split into high and low self-esteem groups and were randomly assigned to one of two comparison conditions (i.e., upward or downward comparison).

To reduce the error due to differences between persons, the experimenter used self-esteem scores to match participants before randomly assigning them to treatments. Once an overall median score was obtained for self-esteem, the participant's scores were tallied and they then were placed into a block that corresponded to the experimental group (i.e., high self-esteem versus low self-esteem). Then, the first four individuals, those with the highest scores, were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental session while the next four in the second block were randomly assigned one of four sessions (see Footnote [1]). This process continued until all participants were assigned to an experimental condition.

Upon arriving to the experimental group session, the participants were greeted by a female experimenter (see Footnote [2]) who informed them, once again, of the fictional cover story (i.e., the study involves assessments concerning the manner in which television programs adequately and realistically depict personal problems for today's college student). Participants then were told that they had been selected because their responses during the mass testing indicated that, as a group, they were fairly similar to one another. This information was used to increase both the likelihood and impact of comparison with the talk show guest.

The main experimenter then asked participants to open the manila folder and locate the paper labeled, "Coping with College Life in the 90s." This survey asked participants to respond to open-ended questions such as, "What do you think is the best thing about being the age you are now?" and " What problems do you think the average college student faces in the 90s?" During this phase of the study, respondents also completed an emotion-focused vs. problem-focused scale and identified how well they adjust to or cope with college-related problems.

After completing this part of the study, the experimenter then instructed the participants to answer the first pretest, which consisted of the life satisfaction measures. After the subjects completed the scale, the experimenter then verbally provided background information on the talk show they were going to watch. Verbal instructions informed each group that they were participating in a study concerned with college students and the problems they face in the 1990s. They were told that they were going to watch and evaluate a segment of a television talk show in order to determine if the television talk show program adequately depicts the life and problems of young people in the 1990s.

Next, participants randomly assigned to the upward or downward comparison condition watched one 6-minute talk show segment. The experimenter started the tape and left the room. After the segment ended, the experimenter returned and instructed participants to return to the manila folder and locate the next set of questionnaires. This survey contained items that were used as the manipulation check and indicated how the participants perceived the guest's competence and degree of overall similarity. After completing this posttest measure, the experimenter asked respondents to complete a final questionnaire assessing life satisfaction. After completing these measures, respondents were escorted to a group debriefing session and were officially dismissed.

Debriefing

Immediately after the experimental session, the principal investigator debriefed the participants. To receive credit, respondents returned to an informational, "post experimental group meeting" followed by an individual interview. At this time, all participants were fully informed of the study's true purpose and hypotheses. The investigator explained why deception was used in this study, provided background information on downward social comparison, and informed participants how social comparison theory might be used to explain how television talk shows enhance viewer mood and help people feel better about their personal problems.

Results

Before the results on the theoretical issues pertaining to social comparison processes are presented, in the section that follows a number of preliminary analyses will be reported and discussed. The preliminary analyses examine the reliabilities of the measurement scales used in assessing the independent and dependent variables, and examine checks of the manipulations for the comparison targets.

Preliminary Analysis

Reliability of Measurement Scales

The following section briefly will discuss the results of data analysis conducted on the reliabilities of the self-esteem and life satisfaction measurement scales. Participant responses to the 10-item self-esteem scale were summed to provide an overall esteem score. Possible esteem scores range from 10 to 50. The average self-esteem score for the sample used in this study was 42.4. A median split was used to classify high self-esteem versus low self-esteem participants.

A self-esteem average of 42.4 (out of 50 total points) may be of some concern as one might conclude that this score is not a valid representation of low self-esteem. However, self-esteem scores obtained for the sample employed in the present study are consistent with prior studies on social comparison and self-esteem (see, for example, Gibbons and McCoy, 1991). Furthermore, according to

Blascovich and Tomaka (1991) self-esteem scale score distributions among college students tends to be negatively skewed such that "low" self-esteem groups have relatively high self-esteem scores in an absolute sense. Thus, careful consideration should be given to the fact that "true" low self-esteem individuals may be those people who have been identified as being "clinically" depressed. Future research might explore and identify how clinically depressed people feel about and react to media programs like TV talk shows.

Of the 101 subjects, approximately 51 individuals scored 0 - 42 and were classified as low in self-esteem while 50 were classified as being high in self-esteem. The mean for low self-esteem participants was, $\underline{M}$= 37.7, $\underline{SD}$ = 4.1, and high self-esteem subjects was, $\underline{M}$ = 46.9, $\underline{SD}$ = 2.3. The self-esteem scale was checked for reliability. Analysis revealed that the scale had an alpha coefficient of α=. 88.

The Affectometer, the instrument used to measure life satisfaction taps into assessing satisfaction with 10 life satisfaction domains: a) positive and negative feelings toward life situations; b) satisfaction with relationships; and c) the amount of social support one receives. Responses to the items measuring these factors were then summed to provide an overall measure of an individual's life satisfaction. Possible scores on the Affectometer range from 40 (very dissatisfied) to 200 (very satisfied). Correlation coefficients among the 40 life satisfaction statements and adjectives were high and were used to form a single index of life satisfaction (α = .91).

Manipulation Checks

Competence of Comparison Target.

Perceived competence of each target was measured by asking participants to rate the talk show guest for competence. Ratings could range from one (very incompetent) to seven (very competent). Data analysis revealed the expected main effect of comparison condition or perceptions of the guest's competence, $\underline{F}$ (1, 89) = 72.3, $\underline{p}$ < .0001. As expected, judges found the upward targets to be significantly more competent ($\underline{M}$ =6.1, $\underline{SD}$ 1.9) than the downward targets ($\underline{M}$ = 1.4, $\underline{SD}$ = 2.1). There were no other significant main effects of or interactions among the independent variables (all $\underline{p}$ > .2). In fact, testing mean differences between levels of competence (Newman-Kuels) indicated that the downward targets (M = 1.4) were seen as less competent than the upward targets (M = 6.1; p < .001). The manipulation of comparison condition, then, was successful at least between the perceived competency level of downward comparison targets and upward comparison targets.

Addressing the Experimental Hypotheses and Research Questions

Data were submitted to a 2 (self-esteem: high versus low) X 2 (comparison condition: upward versus downward) X 2 (Time: Pre versus post test) analysis for the dependent variables of life satisfaction. The following section will discuss the major findings of this data analysis.

The overall factorial design of the present study assessed the effects of self-esteem and feedback on the social comparison process. It was expected that under conditions of downward comparison, persons who are low in self-esteem would experience greater changes in life satisfaction at Time 2 than would high self-esteem individuals. High self-esteem individuals, on the other hand, were expected to experience greater changes in life satisfaction at Time 2 under conditions of upward comparison than would individuals who were lower in self-esteem.

According to the means presented in Table 1, significant main effects of time, or changes in life satisfaction from Time 1 to Time 2, were found for both comparison conditions, F (1, 81) = 6.53, p = .01. Data support the prediction that forced automatic comparisons with TV talk show guests result in a direct enhancement of life satisfaction. Viewers in this study reported feeling better about life after exposure to both upward and downward comparison conditions.

Insert Table 1 about here

The expected three-way interaction among type of comparison condition, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, however, was not found. That is, significant changes in life satisfaction scores as a result of level of self-esteem and type of target were not found, F (1, 81) =. 19, p =. 17. While high and low self-esteem people were found to differ in their perspectives and attitudes to life satisfaction, F (1, 81) = 51.74, p < .0001, a simple interaction based upon comparison condition was not found. Low self-esteem people, when compared to high self-esteem people, did not experience greater increases in life satisfaction after being exposed to downward targets. Furthermore, under conditions of upward comparison, high self-esteem people, according to the data, did not experience greater changes in life satisfaction at Time 2 than people low in self-esteem, F (1,81) = 1.37, p =. 25.

To identify and determine how and where the means differed, two separate post hoc comparison tests were conducted on the self-esteem variable; one test was done in the downward condition and another was later conducted in the upward comparison condition. This post hoc analysis was done so that the researcher could identify exactly if changes in life satisfaction scores differed, and how, if any, changes in life satisfaction were affected. This data analysis revealed that when placed under conditions of downward comparison, high self-esteem people experienced greater boosts F(1, 26) = 9.40 p =.005 in life satisfaction than low self-esteem individuals, F(1, 23) = .20, p =.658 in the upward comparison condition.

DISCUSSION

Data collected in the present study reveals the following:

- A main effect of self-esteem variable on perceptions of life satisfaction, F(1, 55) = 40.9, p < .0001. Consistent with information presented in the Gibbons and Gerrard (1989) study, low self-esteem individuals reported being less satisfied with life circumstances than did high self-esteem subjects.
- Overall, participants in both the downward and upward comparison conditions reported greater life satisfaction scores at Time 2 (M = 131.2, SD = 11.9) than at Time 1 (M = 151.2, SD = 14.7).
- High self-esteem people experienced and reported more increases in global assessments of life satisfaction after exposure to downward targets than persons low in self-esteem.

Before discussing the implications of the results obtained in the present study, it may be useful to review the original experimental predictions and assess how well the results related to the expectations.

First, self-esteem was expected to influence the effects of social comparison. Specifically, it was expected that low self-esteem persons would experience greater boosts in life satisfaction when confronted with downward comparison targets, and high self-esteem individuals would benefit more from and experience greater changes in life satisfaction when confronted with upward comparison targets. The findings, however, did not support this hypothesis. It was, in fact, the high self-esteem individuals who felt better after making downward comparisons when compared with low self-esteem individuals. And high and low self-esteem individuals were not found to differ in their life satisfaction responses to the upward comparison targets.

In the following sections, each of these contradictory findings will be discussed in greater detail. The discussion of alternative explanations will be followed by a brief discussion of the limitations of the study along with a discussion of the theoretical implications of the present study.

Alternative Explanations for the Findings

Selective Attention and Biased Recall

It is possible that high self-esteem people seem to benefit more from the downward comparison because they may have selectively focused on and made comparisons with the talk show guest based on particular self-defining attributes. Future research might explore the idea that viewing motivations may have biased the thinking processes of high and low self-esteem people (Kunda, 1990). High self-esteem people may have chosen to socially compare on attributes or dimensions that made them appear and feel more advantaged (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Wood, 1989). Thus, the incompetent, inferior targets could have motivated high self-esteem people to search memory for beliefs and self-concepts that enhance their existing claims of superiority

Prior beliefs about themselves, their efficacy, as well as control over their future may have biased high self-esteem people to enhance their claims of superiority (Taylor & Brown, 1988). According to Taylor and Brown (1988), "people generally select, interpret, and recall information to be consistent with their prior beliefs" (p. 202). Research suggests that reactions to entertaining programs can be positive or negative, depending on an individual's idiosyncratic needs (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986; Zuckerman, 1979). Under this assumption, it may be hypothesized that the short television talk show segments used in the present study may have actually helped high self-esteem viewers maintain or affirm their positive self-evaluations. Research is needed to determine if TV talk shows produce a type of excitement that helps high self-esteem people feel even better about their own lives and circumstances.

High Self-Esteem Individuals Do Engage in Self-Enhancement

Results obtained from the present study further supports prior evidence on downward social comparison that suggests that all individuals, both high and low self-esteem individuals will strive to enhance their feelings of self-worth, but different people self-enhance in different ways (refer to Brown et al, 1997). High self-esteem individuals, as data collected suggests, do and will engage in self-enhancement. It is possible to hypothesize that self-enhancement in the downward comparison was achieved by confirming their positive self-views with positive feedback or group favoritism (Brown et al., 1997). Future research is needed to determine whether viewers engage in comparisons, and if so, how central the comparisons and the effects of the comparisons are to their motivations for viewing television talk shows. With the aid of a quantitative content analysis of viewer cognitive response to TV talk shows, research may tap into how viewer interpretations of the program , guests, host, and/or audience also affect viewing behavior and motivations.

Timing of the Pre- and Posttest Measures

It is possible that simply by asking respondents the life-satisfaction questions before starting the study and asking the to complete the same measures approximately one-hour later may have sensitized participants to the measures. It seems reasonable to conclude that participants in this study may have been motivated to be or at least appear to be consistent. Therefore, coupled with the proximity of the life satisfaction measures, a desire for consistency may have caused the discrepant findings.

Future research might also focus on the development of a pre- and posttest measure that can determine if certain individuals specifically tune to and are motivated to watch TV talk shows and other negative media content (e.g., violence, nudity, drama or police shows) to make comparisons. Research in this area could be used to determine if viewers are motivated to watch this type of programming to feel better and/or change a negative mood to a more positive one, or if they are simply watching the programming for entertainment purposes. It is possible to speculate that part of the entertainment function of violent or trashy media content is an automatic or forced comparison that results in enhanced self-esteem and life satisfaction. Research in program choice and selective exposure could determine if participants select media based on media images or social information to regulate or specifically change mood or affect.

The present study shows effects of a one-time exposure to TV talk show content. Future investigations of TV talk shows and other media content might employ a time-series design that incorporates multiple observations on the same units. In this case, talk show viewers and their life satisfaction scores might be observed on several occasions. This type of design and data analysis allows researchers to make inferences about the impact and other effects of media content on life satisfaction or mood states. If watching a downward target has an impact, then we would expect life satisfaction scores after exposure to be different and much higher than the scores measured before exposure. A word of caution is needed, particularly for researchers interested in using this design.

A major threat, one that was seriously considered when designing and executing the present study, is the "history" threat to internal validity. One reason that pre-test measures were administered before and after exposure was to control for external forces other than the treatment. When using a time series design as detailed above, other forces outside of the TV talk show may influence life satisfaction scores and attitudes (e.g., relationship problems, death of loved ones, etc). Perhaps, future research might consider this threat to validity and add a no-treatment control group in the time series design in order to obtain an accurate measure of the effects of the TV talk show.

Positive Reminders

Another explanation for the fact that increases in life satisfaction was found for both upward and downward comparison conditions may rest in the idea that the comparison targets (guests on the show) reminded viewers of similar experiences or desires. This "positive" reminder may have provided a type of inspiration or warm feeling which may explain increases in scores, but may not provide evidence of a comparison involving self-enhancement or ego-protection. Future research might be used to explore and assess self-reports or diaries in which participants provide narratives about and descriptions of their media experiences and perceptions of TV talk show targets. For example, a qualitative study in this area may ask participants if they make comparisons with images in television talk shows. Then, researchers might ask participants how frequently they compare with these images and if they compare with the image's lifestyle, problems, or assets.

As in the Wheeler and Miyake (1992), respondents employed in future studies might be asked to record their social comparisons as they make them while watching television. Participants would record thoughts regarding the dimension of comparison (i.e., appearance, personality), the direction of the comparison (i.e., upward, downward, etc), and their mood state when the thought occurred. Research used in this are might provide support for the fact that social comparisons occur naturally and subconsciously when people are confronted with social information.

Future research also might ask people to record their thoughts while watching TV talk shows. Then, using content analysis, researchers can identify all thoughts that contain expressions of or allude to comparisons that people made spontaneously (Wood, 1996). One word of caution is needed, if this method is used or considered. Keep in mind that people may be reluctant to admit that they compared themselves with another, particularly if the other is inferior. However, the strength of this methodology is that free-responses may capture comparisons that focus on selectivity of the comparison target (Wood, 1996). Even Wills (1981) noted that downward comparisons are socially undesirable. Hence, researchers should note that a number of mechanisms have evolved such that people are able to keep the downward comparison relatively private and implicit in order to lower the visibility of the comparison or thought process (Wills, 1981)

Conclusion

> "Seeing misfortunes befall others and seeing them suffering from it thus may make viewers cognizant and appreciative of how good they have it" (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986, p. 317).

It should be noted that many of the guests appearing on television talk shows like *Ricki Lake*, *Jenny Jones*, and *Jerry Springer* tend to be "downward" or at least guests who appear to be involved in tragic, unfortunate events. As a content analysis of the show's topics revealed, rarely do TV talk show programs focus on "upward" guests or people who have successfully overcome serious tragedy (Abt & Mustazza, 1997). The main question guiding the present research focused on understanding why viewers are fascinated with TV talk shows and talk show topics such as "transplant recipients who claim to have adopted the personalities of their donors."

The conclusion to be drawn here, then, appears to be that viewers obtain affective benefits from watching talk shows. Tragic events or exposure to tragic events affords individuals with the opportunity to celebrate their circumstances (Zillmann & Bryant, 1986). In fact, it could be hypothesized that exposure to tragic events invites a forced or automatic social comparison, and this forced comparison provides respondents with the opportunity to compare and contrast their own situation with that of the "worse off" other. While some researchers may argue or doubt that the data clearly and accurately reflect the effects of a specific comparison with the talk show guest, the fact still remains that participants were asked to watch a television talk show, make comparisons with that guest, and then respond to ratings of life satisfaction immediately following the presentation of the talk show guest: Data show that after this experimental procedure, ratings of life satisfaction were found to increase only after comparisons with the downward targets. Thus, viewers may have engaged in a spontaneous comparison with people on television and the effects of the "spontaneous" comparison are self-enhancing. Considering the results obtained in the present study, it seems possible to speculate that media images encourage and may ultimately force some type of social comparison, a comparison process that provides entertaining, even mood enhancing effects for audience members, particularly "when bad things happen to bad people!"

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Table 1

Changes in Life Satisfaction as a Function of Comparison Condition and Self-Esteem.[1]

	Type of Comparison Condition			
	Upward (n=42)		Downward (n=59)	
Self-Esteem	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1	Time 2
Low (n=50)	146.2_a	149.6_a	147.9_a	149.6_a
High (n=51)	167.4_b	168.3_b	170.3_b	175.0_c
Overall Mean	158.3_c	160.3_d	158.1_e	161.2_f

Note: Total possible points on the life satisfaction scale were 200. Judgments were made on 5-point scales (1 = not at all, 5 = all of the time). Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at the $p < .01$ level. Means in the columns that do not share subscripts differ at the $p < .01$ level.

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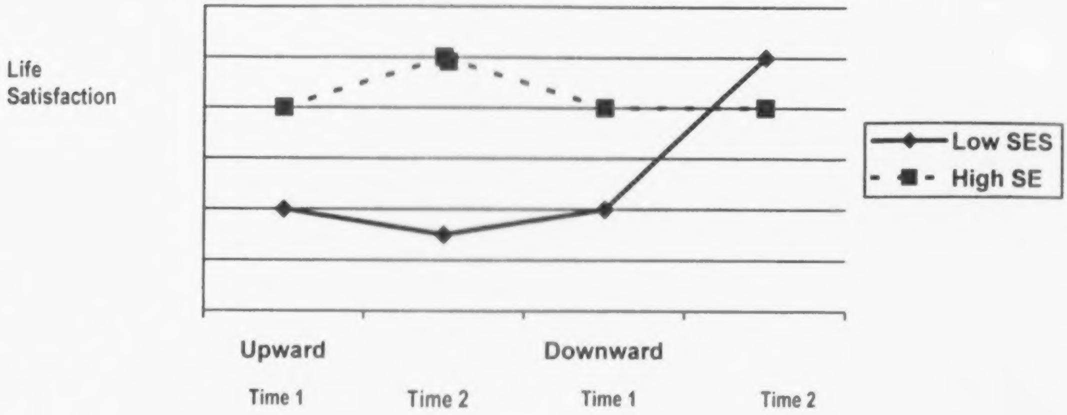
[1] Numbers reflect overall score in life satisfaction. Maximum score on the life satisfaction scale was 200.

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Experimental Predictions of Effects of Comparison Condition and Self-Esteem by Life Satisfaction Scores


Life Satisfaction
Low SES
High SE
Upward
Downward
Time 1
Time 2
Time 1
Time 2

Footnotes

[1] In other words, to be sure all individuals receiving a score of 49, for example, would be equally assigned to conditions, individuals were "blocked" on the basis of their esteem score. The four highest scores (i.e., over 48) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. The next group of scores (i.e., 45-47) were assigned to one of four conditions, and so on.

[2] The experimental techniques and instructions were standardized because the study employed approximately 10 research assistants. Concern was taken to standardize the sex and age of all research assistants. The researcher selected all female confederates who were approximately 21-23 years of age. Confederates acted as experimenters and were told to appear "professional." Several training sessions with experimenters were conducted in which each research assistant was afforded an opportunity to practice reading experimental scripts, complete pretest measures, as well as determine timing and duration of all experimental techniques.